

Agenda

City of Staunton, VA

Strategic Planning Retreat

RR Smith Center, 20 S. New St.

Saturday, September 13, 2025

Time	Task
9:00 am – 10:00 am	• Introductions • Review of City Manager/City Council Philosophy of Relationship Building, Communication and Engagement • Overview of the Strategic Planning Process
10:00 am – 10:45 am	Review Strategies and Goals <i>Update – Staunton Plan (Built Environment, Economic Development)</i> <i>Downtown, City Facilities, Economic Development and Tourism</i>
10:45 am – 11:00 am	Break
11:00 am – 12:15 pm	Review Strategies and Goals <i>Update – Staunton Plan (Infrastructure, West End, Economic Development)</i> <i>Planning and Land Use, Infrastructure</i>
12:15 pm – 1:00pm	Lunch
1:00 pm– 2:15 pm	Review Goals and Strategies <i>Housing, Sustainability/Energy/Solar</i>
2:15 pm – 2:30 pm	Break
2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	<i>Recycling/Solid Waste, Parks and Recreation</i>
3:30 pm - 4:30 pm	Review Goals and Strategies <i>Update – Staunton Plan (Responsive, Efficient Government)</i> <i>Communication/Budget and Finance</i>
4:30 pm – 5:00 pm	<i>Next Steps, Key Takeaways</i>
5:00 pm	<i>Adjourn</i>

City Manager/City Council Philosophy of Relationship Building, Communication and Engagement

The following is offered to City Council as a personal communication from the City Manager to each member. These thoughts, points and suggestions are a compilation of my observations of mentors and practices over the years that seem to work either in terms of promoting efficiency or keeping me out of trouble. They could be referred to as a list of “suggested best practices”. They relate to the relationship of the City Council with the City Manager, staff, the press, and the public. Each Council member will find their own individual way of addressing the issues listed below. Please let me know if there is anything offered here that you would like to discuss.

My Code of Ethics.

- I will never lie to you.
- I will never purposefully do anything that might embarrass you.
- When I disagree with you, I will do so respectfully and communicate the disagreement to you in a timely fashion.
- Although I will do all that I can to support you individually, I work for the entire City Council acting as a whole.
- When I tell you that I cannot do something, I will explain why.
- In addition to the above, I am a member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the Virginia Local Government Managers Association (VLGMA) and I adhere to their Code of Ethics. I am happy to provide you with a copy ICMA's Code of Ethics at your request.

Information Sharing & Communications.

- The City Manager's Office and the Office of Clerk of Council exist to serve the City Council individually and collectively. Information gathered for any individual Council member is shared with all Council members unless we are specifically asked not to.
- We are committed to open and honest communication on all matters.
- Records and emails provided to the Council are (with limited exceptions) public records and is subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
- Please treat any information provided to you that is stamped “Confidential” or “Attorney Client Privilege” appropriately. This information is not public information, as allowed by the FOIA for specific purposes.

- We will be glad to research any issue related to the City of Staunton's government for you.
- Effective communication is a two way street. If you feel that communication is lacking at any time, please initiate contact.
- We will flood you with information, please read it.
- Returning your phone call is our priority.
- Please be accessible and responsive to phone calls from this office.
- Agenda packages are prepared and delivered electronically on the Friday before the regular Council meeting. Please feel free to contact this office or responsible staff members with any questions once you have reviewed the package.
- If you have an issue that you feel Council should discuss, let us know in advance and we will schedule the matter for a future work session in accordance with Staunton City Council Procedural Memorandum Number Three. That way staff can prepare appropriate information to facilitate the discussion.

Dealing with Rumors.

- Don't believe everything you hear, but don't completely dismiss it either. Most rumors have some basis in fact, but sometimes the truth can get so twisted as to be barely recognizable.
- Part of our service to the Council is to help separate the facts from the fiction.
- Please check with us before reacting to the rumor. Although we are sometimes guilty, more often we are not.

Individual Authority v. Council Authority.

- Although we will give you as much individual deference as possible, your true authority exists as a complete body, the City Council.
- We may have to tell you no if you ask for things that are counter to established policy or require a commitment of resources not previously identified by the Council as a body. In that case, you will have to convince a majority of the Council to make the change or commit the resources.

Handling Constituent Complaints and/or Inquiries.

- Be responsive, but please bear in mind that you may initially hear only part of the story.
- Please use City staff for answers and assistance. Hold us accountable for timely and complete responses.
- Don't make promises that you or the staff can't keep. A good response is, "I will look into the matter and I (or staff) will get back with you."
- Sometimes the answer really is "no". We will try to convey that as gently as possible.

- You interpret the Zoning Map and the City Code, especially the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, at your own risk. Remember that sometimes the wording or graphics are not clear and you may be looking at an outdated document. Inquirers will tend to hear what they want to hear and may make decisions or investments based on an erroneous interpretation. They should be referred to the appropriate staff person for the final word.

Personnel Matters.

- The City Manager is responsible for personnel matters involving City staff. Please refer such matters to this office or the Department of Human Resources if you receive an inquiry or a complaint.
- We have fairly extensive personnel policies and procedures. Please let us know if you have any questions.
- We are committed to equity, responsibility and fairness.
- Personnel matters should be handled with respect for privacy.
- Potential and current employees should be encouraged to follow established policies and procedures.

Interaction with City Employees.

- Council members can be intimidating (always unintentionally!) to City employees. In his or her desire to please, the employee may not completely understand the situation, may not have the correct information at their disposal, and, as a result, may not give accurate information or may overstep his or her authority.
- City employees are expected to be respectful of citizens, co-workers and Council members. Being treated with similar respect and being recognized and appreciated by Council members for the good work they do really gives the employees a boost.
- Interactions with employees should go through the department directors to ensure prompt, accurate and effective responses.
- The City Manager's Office will be glad to coordinate necessary contacts with employees, and would actually prefer that. Over time, Council members may grow more comfortable working directly with department directors and that is fine. Department directors are expected to keep this office informed of interactions with Council members. This helps to insure department directors' accountability.
- Complaints/ suggestions from City employees should be passed on to this office. Employees should be willing to identify themselves so that the appropriate follow up can be accomplished. You should ask the employee if he/she has followed the chain of command; have they expressed their concern to their immediate supervisor and/or Department Director? This office is in the chain of command and we have a well-publicized open door

policy; the employee should come here before approaching a Council member with an issue.

- I am not naive and know that, for various reasons, it doesn't always work this way. I don't spend much time worrying about it.

How to Deal with the Press.

- Be accessible.
- Feel free to check with this office prior to speaking with the press. This office is also available to assist you in dealing with the press.
- Don't say anything that you don't want published. Nothing is "off the record".
- Tell the truth. It's ok to say, "I don't know."
- Be careful that your remarks aren't represented as City Council's position.

How to Deal with Rezoning & Conditional Use Permits.

- It is your decision if and when to meet with developers/property owners on planning cases.
- It is advisable to have staff present in such meetings and to conduct the meetings in a public place. Both the Community Development Department and this office have convenient, accessible facilities for such meetings.
- Utilize the Community Development staff to the greatest extent possible.
- Do not make perceived deals or promises. While the rest of the Council may give your position deference, a majority of the Council must make the ultimate decision.

How to Handle Property Acquisition.

- Premature disclosure of City interest in property can affect the price.
- Fair market value is the yardstick by which acquisition is measured.
- Condemnation (eminent domain) is not a dirty word and may be the last resort if the public purpose is to be served.

Contact with Managers of Other Jurisdictions.

- I will be advised, as a matter of ethics, if you contact the manager of another jurisdiction seeking information. This office will be glad to coordinate requests for information from other jurisdictions, either regionally, across the state or nationwide. Staff has a number of professional contacts and can gather the requested information efficiently.

The Budget Process.

- Adopting the budget is one of the biggest decisions that you make as a Council and drives operations for the following year.
- The budget process is an ongoing, year round process. The most intense period for the Council is January to April.
- It's all about choices and setting priorities for the coming year.
- Goal setting is important.
- Creativity is priceless.
- The process is open, inclusive, and designed to promote discussion.
- Be careful about "room packing." Certain public facing departments and agencies can turn out a crowd for budget public hearings. However, many departments don't have public advocates. Sewer lines may not be able to "pack a room" for budget public hearings, but the public expects functional and well maintained sewer services and infrastructure.
- Staff is committed to providing accurate and timely information and will be glad to run any scenario suggested by any Council member.
- We are constantly trying to improve the budget process; recommendations are gladly accepted.