

# NORCROSS VISIONING SESSION

## SUMMARY REPORT



PREPARED BY THE GEORGIA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION  
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## PARTICIPANTS

Elected Officials: Mayor Craig Newton, Mayor Pro Tem Bruce Gaymor, Councilmember Andrew Hixon, Councilmember Josh Bare, Councilmember Matt Myers, Councilmember Marshall Cheek

City Staff: City Manager Eric Johnson, City Clerk Monique Philip, Deputy City Clerk Shayla Alexis

GMA Staff: GMA Member Services Consultant Terrell Jacobs, and Member Services Consultant Michael McPherson

## OVERVIEW

The City of Norcross held a one-day Visioning Session on January 12 at City Hall, which is located at 62 Lawrenceville Street, Norcross, Georgia. Through this process, the participants were able to lay the groundwork for future planning, decision-making, and collective action. For additional information, see **Attachment A – Retreat Presentation**.

## PURPOSE OF VISIONING SESSIONS

Public officials face a demanding and fast-paced work environment, which is even more challenging today with changes in the workforce, development patterns, increased costs, technology, and service delivery expectations. As a result, by taking structured time away from the regular work environment, this allows decision-makers and administrators to collectively define and shape a shared vision for the future of the community. Objectives for Visioning Sessions may include:

- **Goal Setting:** Visioning Sessions help set long-term goals and aspirations. Participants discuss and articulate what they hope to achieve, creating a clear direction for the future.
- **Inspiration & Motivation:** These sessions are designed to inspire and motivate participants by creating a compelling and exciting vision. A well-crafted vision can energize individuals and teams, fostering enthusiasm and commitment.
- **Alignment:** Visioning Sessions bring stakeholders together to ensure alignment on the organization's or project's mission and goals. This alignment is crucial for coordinated efforts and effective collaboration.
- **Strategic Planning:** The outcomes of a Visioning Session often serve as the foundation for strategic planning. Once the vision is established, organizations can develop strategies and action plans to work towards its realization.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Involving various stakeholders, including employees, community members, and leaders, in the visioning process ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to a more inclusive and comprehensive vision.
- **Decision-Making Guide:** A well-defined vision can serve as a guide for decision-making. When faced with choices, organizations can refer to their vision to ensure that decisions align with their long-term goals.
- **Communication:** The vision created in a Visioning Session becomes a powerful communication tool. It can be shared with internal and external stakeholders to convey the organization's purpose, values, and future aspirations.

- **Cultural Development:** A strong vision contributes to the development of a positive organizational culture. It helps define the values and principles that guide behavior and decision-making within the organization.
- **Evaluation & Progress Tracking:** The established vision provides a basis for evaluating progress. Organizations can measure their success and impact against the vision, adjusting strategies as needed to stay on course.
- **Adaptability:** While a vision sets a long-term direction, it also allows for adaptability. Organizations can evolve and respond to changing circumstances while remaining aligned with their core purpose and values.

## CHECK-IN: WHERE ARE YOU NOW

A "Check-In" at the beginning of a meeting is an opportunity for participants to briefly share their feelings, perspectives, or general well-being regarding the city. It serves as a way to gauge the collective emotional and mental state of the group, fostering open communication and a sense of connection. The feedback received from this activity included: **Good Shape, Growth Potential, Potential, Promise, Greater Potential, Right Direction** and **Ready**.

## TRUST

Trust is a fundamental element for the success and sustainability of local governments. It creates a positive environment for effective governance, community development, and the overall well-being of the residents. The benefits of building trust include:

- **Public Confidence and Legitimacy:** Trust is the foundation of the relationship between citizens and their government. When people trust their local government, they are more likely to believe in its legitimacy and authority. This confidence is essential for the effective functioning of a democratic system.
- **Effective Governance:** Trust facilitates cooperation and collaboration between citizens and local government officials. When there is a high level of trust, people are more willing to engage with government initiatives, follow regulations, and contribute to community development. This, in turn, leads to more effective governance.
- **Social Cohesion:** Trust fosters a sense of community and social cohesion. When residents trust their local government, they are more likely to participate in community activities, volunteer for public projects, and work together for the common good. This creates a positive and cohesive local environment.
- **Policy Implementation:** Trust is crucial for the successful implementation of policies and programs. If citizens trust their local government, they are more likely to support and comply with new policies. This trust can streamline the implementation process and reduce resistance or opposition.
- **Responsive Governance:** Trust encourages open communication between citizens and local officials. People are more likely to express their concerns, provide feedback, and engage in dialogue when they trust that their voices will be heard. This enables local governments to be more responsive to the needs and preferences of the community.

- **Crisis Management:** In times of crisis or emergency, trust becomes even more critical. When trust exists, citizens are more likely to follow government guidelines, cooperate with emergency response efforts, and remain calm during challenging situations. This can significantly impact the effectiveness of crisis management.
- **Attracting Investment and Talent:** Trustworthy local governments are more likely to attract investment and skilled professionals. Businesses and individuals are more inclined to invest in or relocate to areas where they have confidence in the local government's stability, fairness, and ability to provide essential services.



## COMMUNICATION

Communication is one of the most essential services in local government, including internal and external communication forms. As a local government, communication promotes efficiency, transparency, public participation, and trust. It enhances the delivery of public services, strengthens democracy, and contributes to the overall well-being and development of the community. Communication examples include:

- **Information Sharing:** Effective communication ensures the timely and accurate dissemination of information within the local government organization. This includes sharing updates, policies, regulations, and decisions among various departments, officials, and employees. It helps everyone stay informed and aligned, fostering transparency and reducing confusion or misunderstandings.
- **Public Engagement:** Local government serves the community it represents. By communicating effectively, local governments can engage with residents, businesses, and community organizations, informing them about public services, initiatives, and decisions affecting their lives. It allows for public input, feedback, and collaboration, resulting in more inclusive and participatory governance.
- **Policy Implementation:** Local government relies on effective communication to implement policies and programs successfully. Clear and consistent communication ensures that employees and stakeholders understand their roles, responsibilities, and the objectives of the initiatives. It facilitates coordination, cooperation, and efficient execution of plans, leading to effective policy implementation.

- **Crisis Management:** During emergencies, natural disasters, or other crises, local governments are critical in ensuring public safety and providing support. Communication becomes vital in these situations to relay important information, issue alerts, and warnings, provide instructions, and coordinate emergency response efforts. Timely and accurate communication can save lives and minimize damage.
- **Building Trust & Accountability:** Transparent and open communication is essential for building trust between local governments and the community. When local officials and administrators communicate effectively, they demonstrate their commitment to accountability, responsiveness, and good governance. It allows the public to hold their representatives accountable and builds confidence in the government's ability to serve the community's needs.
- **Collaboration & Partnerships:** Local governments often need to work with other stakeholders, such as neighboring municipalities, regional bodies, non-profit organizations, or private sector entities. Effective communication fosters collaboration as well as enables the exchange of ideas, resources, and expertise. It helps build partnerships and coalitions to address common challenges and achieve shared goals.

## ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Each participant was asked to share their primary expectations of staff and council. By openly discussing, this resulted in a clear path for all parties in order to establish trust, good communications, and process for collaboration.

### Mayor & Council Expectations

- Follow the Law, always act in ethical manner, err on the side of caution, if clarification is needed, staff should consult Council.
- Concerned with unintended consequences. See something, say something.
- Intent vs Letter of the Law. Staff should be trained to understand the intent of the law.
- Communication between senior staff and the council needs improvement.
- Council should be made aware of important issues that could impact the city in a quick manner.
- Staff expertise should guide some decision making.
- City Manager should solicit feedback from staff, consider creating a process for effective communication.
- Staff should follow the chain of command with the City Manager at the head.
- City Manager should always be made aware of conversations between Council and staff.
- Department directors should give regular reports to the Council, so the Council is aware of how departments are run.
- Orientation process for new Councilmembers.

### Staff Expectations

- "Open Door" policy is there for convenience and should not be taken literally.
- Be aware of the amount of time spent on calls, emails, and visits to the City Manager.
- Do not assume things about staff. Process and review of incidents will take place.

- All personnel issues should be directed to the City Manager for resolution. Council should not be involved with personnel matters.
- Follow policies that are in place. The Employee Handbook should be updated periodically.
- Determine what items the City Manager can take on vs. which items should go to Councilmembers.
- Departments will be reporting metrics monthly.

## BUILDING TRUST FOR TEAM NORCROSS

Actively cultivating trust is an ongoing process that requires open communication, consistency, and a commitment to fostering positive relationships among team members. Trust is a valuable asset that contributes to the long-term success and resilience of any team. Key items that were discussed include:

- **City Charter:** There was a consensus that revising the city charter is necessary to remove ambiguity and inconsistencies. In addition, an educational component should be incorporated for employees and the public to explain why the changes are needed.
- **City Manager:** The conversation regarding the city manager's contract and the review process timing indicated the need for incorporating a mid-term review. It is essential to establish clear and measurable expectations. Prioritizing monthly one-on-one meetings between the city manager and council members is crucial for fostering trust through enhanced communication. This approach ensures that both parties have the opportunity to express themselves and be understood.
- **Elected Officials:** in an effort to strengthening the working relationships amongst the elected officials, Mayor and Council emphasized the need for each to communicate and collaborate more together.

## VISION, MISSION, VALUES & MARKETING MATERIALS

A review of the 2023 priorities led to agreement that the city's vision statement still currently reflected what the city is striving toward. An exercise was used to create an up-to-date mission statement and a few examples were generated for perfecting later. The group reviewed the "Imagination Proclamation" and agreed to refresh "A Place to Imagine."

### Council Priorities for City Manager

- Public safety building schedule, communications plan, including information posted to the website.
- Mentorship program for senior staff.
- Leadership training with focus on succession.
- Norcross Power resiliency strategy / enterprise strategic business manager.
- Comprehensive process improvement plan with Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs).
- Financial strategy—short budget overview each month.
- Consistent signage initiative—Councilmembers Hixon and Myers will share ideas.

### City Manager's Focus Points for 2024

- Understand and plan for OPEB liability.
- Drive stormwater and resurfacing of streets.
- Uphold quality of life in general.

***\*Note: Mayor submitted a document included as Attachment B.***

## BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

At the City Council retreat, discussions centered around a wide variety of topics including the city's overall structure, communication, roles and responsibilities, land development regulations, city infrastructure improvements and property. Actions Items include:

**Action Item 1:** Revise the city charter to remove ambiguity and inconsistencies, while also incorporating an educational component to explain the changes.

Assigned To: Mayor, Council, City Manager, City Attorney

Timeframe: 6 months

**Action Item 2:** Incorporate a mid-term review for the City Manager position.

Assigned To: Mayor, Council

Timeframe: Immediately

**Action Item 3:** Strengthen the working relationship with the elected body (e.g. one on one meetings, meal meetings, etc.).

Assigned To: Mayor, Council

Timeframe: Continuous

## CHECK-OUT: WHERE ARE YOU NOW

A "Check-Out" at the end of a meeting allows participants to reflect on the information shared, the discussions, and next steps. Feedback on this portion included: **Optimism, Potential, Thoughtful, Trending, Right Direction, Ready** and **Overwhelmed**.

## CLOSING

During the retreat, the Mayor, Council, and staff actively participated in open dialogues and team-building exercises, cultivating a robust sense of unity and a shared purpose. The members of the Norcross City Council are strong advocates for their city, deeply committed to enhancing its quality of life. The prioritization of a robust communications plan is crucial to continuing to cultivate an increased trust amongst the elected body, City Manager and staff. The Vision Session served as a respectful forum where every voice found expression, leading to a collaborative convergence of perspectives poised to positively influence the future of the City of Norcross. To ensure the ongoing impact of this gathering, it is crucial to sustain the momentum, renewed energy, and strategic insights gained, fortifying our dedication to building a thriving, resilient, and vibrant city for all.