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Creativity Redefined!

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**CITY OF MT. VERNON, ILLINOIS
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP MEETING
Monday, May 2, 2022**

The Mt. Vernon City Council called a Workshop Meeting for Monday, May 2, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. at City Hall, 1100 Main Street, Council Chamber Room, 2nd Floor, Mt. Vernon, Illinois.

Mayor John Lewis called the meeting to order.

ROLL CALL

Roll call showed present: Council Member Joe Gliosci, Council Member Donte Moore, Council Member Mike Young, and Mayor John Lewis. Absent: Council Member Ray Botch.

Also present: City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel, Jim Arndt of Arndt Municipal Support, Assistant City Manager Nathan McKenna, and Deputy City Clerk Becky Barbour.

VISITORS/CITIZEN'S REQUESTS/ADDRESSES FROM THE AUDIENCE

No visitors spoke at the meeting.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF MT. VERNON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

City Manager Mary Ellen Bechtel stated that this meeting was being held to review and discuss the results of the meetings and community input regarding the Mt. Vernon Comprehensive Plan. City Manager Bechtel introduced James (Jim) Arndt of Arndt Municipal Support to give the results of the meetings held in the community. Mr. Arndt provided an informational packet to the Council Members for their review. The following is a break-down of participants from the meetings:

**2022
Comprehensive Plan
Community Listening Session
Data Sheet**

- **14** listening sessions were conducted from February 1, 2022, to March 24, 2022.
- There were **102** total participants at the Listening Sessions.
- The average turnout was **7.29** participants per listening session.
- Participants were provided the opportunity to complete a written suggestion card at each of the sessions. There were **17** suggestion cards submitted.
- There were **2** written comments submitted from residents that did not participate in the sessions.
- Completed **1** Listening Session Data Review Session with the City's Executive Staff that included **14** Team members.
- Planning participants were guided through a series of questions designed to generate community feedback. Below is a compiled number of comments made:

Category	Number of Unique Suggestions/Thoughts
What does the City do well?	40
Where can the City improve?	110
What Quality of Life Improvements can the City make?	36
Why Mt. Vernon?	45
What City services do you need/want?	72
Why not Mt. Vernon?	37
Total	340

Mr. Arndt also had additional information with breakdown of the following issues.

TOP TEN

The following were the ten most popular issues mentioned by the listening session participants:

1. Indoor Recreation Center (17)
2. Increase retail/restaurant diversity (14)
3. Communication with Community (13)
4. Parks, Recreation, and Greenspace (12)
5. Residential Development (11)
6. Youth Activities (10)
7. Affordable Housing (9)
8. Industrial Jobs (8)
9. Population Growth (7)
10. Renew Southside (7)

Major Themes/Categories

Below are the major themes/categories identified throughout the sessions:

- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities
- Public Safety
- Community Development
- Economic Development
- Quality of Life
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Strengths

The following were the top strengths identified for Mt. Vernon:

- Location
- Safe
- Cedarhurst (Museum)
- Interstates
- Hometown Feel
- Affordable Cost of Living
- Education
- Health Care
- Friendly
- Water Infrastructure

Weaknesses

The following were the top weaknesses identified for Mt. Vernon:

- High Property Taxes
- Town is Divided
- Lack of Things to do
- High Taxes
- Do Not Feel Safe
- Discrimination
- Racism
- Too Much Investment Outside The Core of the City
- Old Housing Stock

Desired Quality of Life Initiatives

The following were the most popular quality of life improvements:

- Indoor Community/Aquatic/Recreation Center
- More Parks, Recreational Sites, and Greenspace
- More Youth Activities
- Increase Restaurant/Dining Diversity
- Increase Retail Diversity
- More Walking and Bike Trails
- Grocery Stores on Southside and Eastside
- Family Activities (mini-golf, go-carts, etc.)
- Teenage Hang-out/Club
- Community Sporting Opportunities (baseball, softball, etc.)

Desired City Services

The following were identified as the most coveted City services:

- Residential Development
- City-wide Clean-up
- Residential Rehabilitation Grant Program
- Replace Outdated Infrastructure
- Business Incentives Recruiting/Retention
- Market/Promote the City
- Internet Access for all Residents
- New/Improve/Simplify Garbage Service
- Retail Development
- Technical/Vocational Training
- Expand CTS Bus Service Locations and Hours
- Proactive Inspection Program – Improve Permitting Process

Improvement

The following were identified as the top areas of improvement:

- Communication with Residents
- Affordable Housing
- Renewal of the Southside
- Industrial Development and Job Creation
- Population Growth
- Utilize the Armory
- Segregation/Division Within the City
- Downtown Improvements
- Townhouses and Apartments
- Reputation

Executive Staff Key Points

The following are the key thoughts provided by the City's Executive Staff after reviewing and considering the listening session data:

- The following projects are underway and are reaffirmed by the listening session data:
 - a. Implementing smart city traffic signals now
 - b. Infilling the mall now
 - c. Building a fitness court now
 - d. Working with the bus system on a regional transfer station to other cities now
 - e. Working diligently on increasing diversity in the police department
 - f. Working on cleaning up vacant housing now
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- g. Annually investing 75% of the city's infrastructure improvements in the southside of the City
 - h. Working on sewer backups, new roads, and new streetlights in the southside
 - i. Working on increasing diversity within the City's leadership team
 - j. Providing City-wide clean-up services on a weekly basis
 - k. Working with the bus system to provide routes to the Aquatic Zoo now
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- o **The executive staff thought the following issues merit further consideration in the upcoming plan:**
 - a. Pursuing quality of life initiatives
 - b. Indoor recreational/aquatic facility
 - c. Improving communications with the residents/connecting with them better
 - d. Residential development
 - e. Affordable housing
 - f. Breaking down the southside divide
 - g. Publicize current housing programs
 - h. Promote the mow to own program
 - i. Social workers/mental health team
 - j. Need to market to our community – toot our own horn
 - k. Park improvements
 - l. Park water features
 - m. Miniature Golf and Skate Park
 - n. Fill the gaps in the sidewalks leading to the Aquatic Zoo
 - o. Having issues with the Bulk Pickup – breakdown in the system
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- o **The executive staff felt the following listening session feedback supports current planned activities and/or grant opportunities:**
 - a. Park development
 - b. Downtown development and event space
 - c. Sidewalks
 - d. Water and transportation infrastructure
 - e. Park maintenance
 - f. Widening of Veteran's Drive
 - g. Improvements to the Aquatic Zoo intersection
 - h. Outdoor spaces development
 - i. Sewer improvements
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The Council Members then studied the comment cards that were prepared by Mr. Arndt from comments made by the community during the meetings. There was then continued discussion regarding the ten-year plan. Mr. Arndt discussed the plan themes and how to plan to meet the goals for the major categories for the next ten years. They also discussed the suggested plan titles (slogans). Council Member Donte Moore stated he liked the slogan “Your Vision, Our Mission.” Council Member Joe Gliosci agreed that he liked that slogan as well.

o **Plan Themes (Primary 10-year Goal Areas of Concentration)**

Original	ES Feedback	Blend
Housing	Residential Housing	Housing
Transportation	Parks and Recreation	Parks and Recreation
Utilities	Community Development/Communications	Community Development (Communications and DEI)
Public Safety	Public Safety/Mental Health Resources	Public Safety (Mental Health Resources)
Community Development		Economic Development
Economic Development		Transportation
Quality of Life		Utilities
Diversity/Equity/Inclusion		

o **The executive staff provided the following potential plan Titles (slogans):**

- a. Focus on the future
- b. Coming together 2032
- c. One decade at a time
- d. Our future together
- e. Your vision, our mission

The Council continued discussion with Mr. Arndt regarding the future of Mt. Vernon and the Comprehensive Plan. Many of the issues listed in the community comments are current projects, including water & sewer improvements, downtown development, east side and south side improvements.

There is much concern to develop more community involvement such as getting people to come to Council Meetings and to be more involved. The City currently has Council Meetings in person and online on Facebook. There was additional discussion regarding how to get the word out to community members via newsletters, newspaper, surveys, etc. The City has good programs. It needs to promote them and connect with the citizens. Communication is key. Partnering with local churches and organizations is an effective way to reach citizens.

One of the suggestions was social workers to help with domestic abuse and other situations. Mr. Arndt stated some cities are hiring social workers to have on staff to work with police and fire departments. Mayor Lewis stated our police and fire departments do very well in that area. The local Red Cross and United Way are very helpful with mental health resources.

The quality of life comments vary. Quality of life means something different to each person. Some people wanted a Recreation Center, others believe quality of life means their water, sewer, etc.

Mayor Lewis mentioned that there is currently discussion regarding starting a foundation to help with projects.

In the next ten years – Council Member Donte Moore stated he would like to see the bike patrols again – community policing. He believes this would help rebuild relationships with officers. Mayor Lewis stated the Downtown Event Area is going to be a huge asset. He believes this is important for the community. Council Member Donte Moore stated that the City works extremely hard on maintaining and improving the infrastructure, and that is headed in the right direction; however, these projects take a while to complete. Affordable housing was high on the list; however, Council Member Joe Gliosci stated that affordable housing is subject to interpretation as to what is affordable. Council Member Donte Moore stated that public safety is listed. Cameras have been placed around the City to help in that area. Most people liked the cameras and wanted to see that program expanded.

Mr. Arndt stated that the community members that participated in the meetings loved the opportunity and were very appreciative of the planning process this year. He stated that the participants loved the work the Mayor and City Manager are doing and the direction of the Council.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

No Executive Session was held.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Joe Gliosci motioned to adjourn. Seconded by Council Member Donte Moore. Yeas: Gliosci, Moore, Young, and Lewis. Absent: Botch.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Becky Barbour
Deputy City Clerk