
Open Work Session
Wicomico County Strategic Plan
February 19, 2019

Councilman McCain said, over the past year, actually, while everyone was campaigning for Office, the idea of a strategic plan came up numerous times as far as a formal strategic plan for Wicomico County. He reported, a lot of the County Departments have strategic plans, so, in some ways, this is a little bit of the tail wagging the dog because they really should have an umbrella strategic plan for the County with the Departments forming their strategic plans to accomplish the County's strategic plan. He said, as a result, he put some effort into coming up with a base plan they can work with. He said he has been working on this along with Mrs. Laura Hurley, and he has to thank her quite a bit for putting together the presentation they have today, and also for a lot of the research done on this. He said he also wants to make it clear that this is a Wicomico County plan, and not a Council plan, or an Executive plan, but a Wicomico County plan. He clarified, it says "prepared by," but maybe that word "by" should be "for" because it is really for the County, and they have gotten some feedback from the Executive Office. He explained, at this stage of the game, this plan is trying to incorporate the top goals of the Executive Office, and incorporates goals they asked Councilmembers to submit, which some did, so those that were submitted are incorporated into this. He said some of the goals, he thinks, are pretty obvious, but, really, it is a starting point to formalize the goals and visions of Wicomico County, laying out the strategies to accomplish those goals and visions, and also establishing ways to measure their progress along the way. He said they have to keep in mind that a strategic plan is just that. He clarified, it is not a form of Legislation, and is not something they are forced to do year after year, or forced to do in their budget. He said, basically, the plan is designed to ask questions when they are making decisions, asking if these decisions are attempting to accomplish their strategic plan, and is a roadmap for the future. He said most strategic plans nowadays are typically five years, which would be considered a long-term plan, but, in today's world, it is really more of a three-year cycle. He said the plan is also usually visited annually, and, in fact, it is important to visit it on an annual basis, particularly in their role of Government as things could change. He explained, they just heard in their discussions earlier that something could change at the State level that gets passed down to the County, which changes their position and goals moving forward on some things, so they have to be flexible to incorporate that.

Mr. Holloway said Mr. McCain stated this is a County plan, and not a Council or Executive plan. He then asked if this is something he is going to want voted on and adopted, or is it just something for review, to which Mr. McCain responded, once again, that is something they can talk about, but he does not think it is something that necessarily has to be voted on in the end, though other Councilmembers might have a different opinion on that. He said he thinks, in the end, they just want to come up with something everyone can agree on, although they are not all going to agree on every aspect of it, keeping in mind it is a plan, and not a law. He said, whether or not Council wants to make this something they vote on formally, he will yield to what Council thinks is in their best interest. Mr. Holloway said, with a comprehensive plan, they have to vote on it because it is law, to which Mr. McCain responded, the difference with that is it is required by law, but this is really a roadmap they are developing as a County. Mr. Holloway said he looked at this plan quite extensively, and he sees some things that are real interesting, but the one thing that jumps out at him when he reads it is that Government changes. He clarified, they could have a different County Executive next term, and they could have a completely different Council, so that is his concern about locking something in, to which Mr. McCain responded, they are not really locked into anything. He said their plan is a four-year plan, and that is why he thinks the timing of this is important so they can have a plan everyone has some agreement on. He clarified, a

lot of things can change in four years, particularly in local Government, so a four-year cycle is what they are looking at when it comes to their plan, but, at the same time, they want to visit it every year.

Mr. McCain said he will not go through the plan item by item, but his main objective today is to introduce this, give everyone a chance to digest some of the goals and strategies, and then he would like Council to pass their comments and suggestions to Mrs. Hurley so they can start incorporating those into a revised version. He said it is going to take several drafts of this to get to something that everyone feels good about. He said he wants to walk through the plan a little bit, and some of the first things are general, generic things, such as the Executive Summary, and how they got to where they are today in terms of their Government structure. He said the mission statement has been taken from some things that already exist for the County, and the strategic vision is included. He said the five core values are pretty typical where most strategic plans will have something similar to this, but they can add things, or change some wording there depending on the feedback.

Mr. McCain said, starting with goals, these goals incorporate what they have been collecting from the Executive Office, what they have seen in Councilmember's statements, and goals for Wicomico County, so they have tried to be as comprehensive as possible including as many goals as possible. He said Goal A is responsible management of County budget to ensure and sustain fiscal strength and stability. He said, obviously, budget is big for them as Councilmembers, and is probably their biggest responsibility, so that is the first one. He said there are several objectives associated with the budget goal, as they can see, and he will touch on those quickly. He said these objectives include effective allocation of resources to meet current and future operating and capital needs, which is kind of obvious. He said the next objectives are to maintain stable, protected reserves, and to maintain affordable, competitive tax levies. He explained, they are always sensitive to their tax rate, particularly in a County where they have a revenue cap. He said the fourth objective is procuring lowest cost goods, services, and assets that support County operations, and one thing that comes to mind is not just lowest cost, but efficiency as well. He said he is not going to go through each of the objectives, but will ask Council to spend some time on these objectives, make some comments to Mrs. Hurley, and they will do some massaging of the strategies to accomplish each of the different objectives. He said they break down each of the objectives to the different strategies as to how to accomplish those objectives. He said they will start seeing a theme for each of the goals where they have the strategies and performance measures because they have to be able to measure what they are accomplishing. He said for some things that is easier said than done, but they need performance measures to reference to see if they are on track to accomplishing their goals, and they will probably get more specific. He said Mr. Wayne Strausburg, Director of Administration, can help them on their debt ratios, and things of that nature, to really be more specific because right now they have a lot of generalities, but they want to make it more specific.

Mr. McCain said Objective 2 is to maintain stable, productive reserves, and, once again, they have the same kind of structure with strategies and performance measures to do that. He said Objective 3 is to maintain affordable, competitive tax levies, with the same pattern of strategies and performance measures, and it is the same thing with the fourth objective of procuring the lowest cost, efficient goods, services, and assets that support the County operation.

Mr. McCain said Goal B is responsible management of the Salisbury-Ocean City: Wicomico Regional Airport. He said a lot of people included the Airport in their goals, and want to see the Airport grow and become an even larger enterprise operation for the County. He said the Airport is another Department in the County that has a very formal, long-term, five-year strategic plan, so they are incorporating a lot

of that into this plan because they already have one. He said they have a very detailed plan that they keep very well up to date, and, once again, the Airport has strategies and performance measures.

Mr. McCain said he will just touch on the different goals, and Goal C is water and sewer expansion. He said there has been a lot of discussion about sewers, and the biggest area they have to address is how to deal with failing septic systems throughout the County, how to address the idea of future growth for the County, and the different objectives to accomplish that. He said, once again, they have the objectives and strategies to do that, and then the performance measures to see if they are accomplishing that.

Mr. McCain said Goal D is to provide a well-maintained transportation infrastructure, but, the irony is, some of these items they are talking about as goals, yet, in the relatively short meeting they had today, they already talked about several of them. He said they heard public comments addressing concerns about having well-maintained roadways and stormwater drainage, and flooding during heavy rain events, so that is why he incorporated this since they are issues people have set as primary objectives for the County. He said, once again, there are strategies and performance measures under Goal D.

Mr. McCain said Goal E is preserving and protecting public safety, and, obviously, this is one of the top priorities in the County, so they have objectives, strategies, and performance measures around that.

Mr. McCain said Goal F is to have a professional County Government workforce, and, literally, that came up today in their discussions as well surrounding trying to hire people, and fill a lot of open positions they have. He said they have their strategies surrounding that along with the performance measures.

Mr. McCain said Goal G is responsible management of County Parks and Recreation areas, and, once again, the Recreation and Parks Department has a very well-done, long-term strategic plan, which is incorporated into this document.

Mr. McCain said Goal H is the County Public School System, and listed as an objective is to have one of the top ten schools in the State of Maryland that provides continuous learning to students in prekindergarten through high school graduation. He said there are performance measures the State provides to see how they are performing, but they are going to get the Board of Education to help them a little bit with some of the specifics. He explained, there are two main measurement criteria that are used for performance, and they will try to get that incorporated into this plan a little more specifically to see how they are doing from a performance standpoint. He said they rank a little below average in the two main performance categories, but not by much, so getting into the top ten is not much of a stretch.

Mr. McCain said, when it comes to goals for any strategic plan, they want to challenge themselves. He said, for example, if someone is a runner and wants to run a 7-minute mile, but can already run a mile in 7:05, they would not want to make running a 7-minute mile their goal. He clarified, if they are running an 8-minute mile, then their goal might be to run a 7-minute mile, and they can get there. He said it might be a challenge, but they can get there. He said, to get there, they have to have a plan, a strategy, and a way to measure progress as they go along, and that sort of relates to each of these goals set for the County. He said, basically, the intent today is to introduce this as a first draft of a long-term strategic plan. He said they shared this with the Executive Office, who gave them some feedback, and now they have shared it with Councilmembers, so he is asking Council to provide some healthy feedback. He then asked Council to send their questions, comments, and suggestions to Mrs. Hurley, and they will try to incorporate as much of that as possible into a second draft to bring back to Council for more discussion once it is a little more specific, and once everyone has had a chance to take a look at it. He said he will

end with a quote; "When it comes to planning, a failure to plan is a plan to fail," so they need a plan, and this is a good start for the County. He said they received some positive feedback already, and he knows several people expressed some questions, which they are already starting to incorporate.

Mr. Holloway said there is one thing that was not put under education that really bothers him. He explained, he had a visit from an elementary substitute teacher who is discontinuing being a substitute teacher because she is afraid for her safety, and that is something he did not see in the plan. He clarified, he is not criticizing Mr. McCain. He said years ago he heard from teachers about their pay scale, and that they needed to make more money, but now he hears from teachers, teacher's aides, and substitute teachers that they are afraid for their safety, so that is something that really has to be addressed. He said he hears the excuse that the State controls who they expel, and what they will and will not let them do, but, when they have a teacher who is physically fit and, basically, tells him she is not going to be teaching elementary school anymore because the kids do not know how to act, and she is afraid for her safety, that is reaching a pretty low point in their school system. Mr. McCain said that is a very good point, and he thinks under strategies they need to add school climate, safety, and discipline because that is something they hear time and time again. Mr. Holloway said, not to discount Mr. McCain's plan, but this needs to be put on the top burner for the Board of Education to do something about this because they cannot keep having people going home feeling like they are being threatened, or that their safety is not there, to which Mr. McCain responded, he definitely agrees. Mr. Dodd said, when he met with a lot of teachers during the election, that was one of their biggest concerns, to which Mr. McCain responded, he agrees 100 percent, and they definitely need to add that under strategies.

Mr. Cannon said this is a really good piece that Mr. McCain did an excellent job on, and it was no small task. He said Mr. McCain covered practically every area he can think of. He said there is mention of collaboration with the municipalities and the City of Salisbury, but maybe they can add the State of Maryland as well because that would make sense. He said they may want to include an initiative to more forcefully address the issue as far as grants are concerned, but he does not know how that gets wrapped up into the other processes. He clarified, he thinks that is where they are really at a shortfall in Wicomico County as they may not be taking advantage of all of the grants. He said he may be wrong as he is not that close to all of the Departments, but it seems like a lot of them are sort of done ad hoc, and certain Departments will really stress grants more than others, so he does not know if maybe they need a collaborative effort on grant funding where they would bring one person in who does it for everyone, or whether they have to isolate it. He said that may be part of what they want to look at.

Mr. Cannon said, in Goal A, Objective 3, Mr. McCain touched on SWED (Salisbury Wicomico Economic Development), but they need a real solid commitment on taking a position on economic development, and County branding as well. He said he does not know if branding is always that great, but he has seen other Counties where they have done a great job with branding. He said, at MACo, they demonstrated a great branding plan, but he does not know if it ever really got them any more money. He said, outside of that individual County, he has not heard much about it since. He said he thinks they need to look at whether they want to focus on branding, and economic development has to be a very high priority, almost a category instead of a subcategory, to which Mr. McCain responded, that is a good point. He said, in fact, talking about the issue of branding, he does not necessarily like to even use the term "branding," but likes the term "identity." He clarified, they need an identity of what they are known for. He said, in fact, a lot of times when he thinks of Wicomico County, something they are known for that other people cannot match is their recreational opportunities. He explained, they have some of the largest sporting events in the Country right here in their County, and they have numerous other events that are very significant. Mr. Dodd said that falls under marketing, to which Mr. McCain responded, they

have to look at whether they are marketing enough. He said, once again, there are recreational opportunities, such as the Seagull Century, and the Folk Festival added to the recreational and entertainment events they have as a County, which is something Wicomico has that other Counties do not. Mr. Cannon said that is a great point because he thinks the first question asked when someone is relocating here is about the schools, and the second question is usually what there is to do for their family, and there is a lot to do here. Mr. McCain said there is a lot more to do here than people realize. Mr. McCain said they have this all in one County, so they have a good story to tell, but sometimes he wonders how good of a job they are doing telling their story.

Mr. Cannon said the only other suggestion he has is about transportation and infrastructure, and he thinks they should include ferries in there. He said it talks about roads and bridges, and they might as well go ahead and add ferries because the County is very unique in that aspect.

Mr. Dodd said they mentioned grants, and he wonders if the Executive Office has considered a full-time grant writer. He said he was on the Board of Education, and they have a full-time grant writer. He said she attends every Board meeting to give updates, and the amount of money brought in is significant, and he thinks pays for her salary. Mr. Wayne Strausburg then came to the podium and said that is an excellent point, and an effective grant writer is going to pay for him or herself. He explained, they have people in various Departments, some much better than others, but those going after the grants also get caught up in the day to day tasks that face that Department, so they may miss a grant, or they may miss a deadline. He said he thinks this County is large enough, and there are enough grant opportunities, that they should have a dedicated grant writer. He said, to Mr. Cannon's point, he had the same thought about economic development. He clarified, while every aspect of this plan supports economic development, he thinks they should make a point of investing themselves in the goal of supporting economic development without sacrificing the quality of community because there is a crossroad where they begin to lose the rural nature of the County if they go too far with economic development. He said the other thing he would like to mention is that this community over time has become much, much more culturally diverse, and he thinks they should also include something in the plan that would focus the County in favor of cultural inclusion. He said he thinks that should be a real focal point for them.

Mr. Hastings said this was great work, and it was really nice to be able to see a lot of the small details he sent in included in the plan. He said it really looks like something they can point to, even if it is never adopted. He said just the fact that folks are putting in their ideas, Council can say they are a County that is actually working, and show the good things they are doing despite what is seen as Government dysfunction on the Federal level, or anything that may be said on the local level. He said they have a plan and are working together, and that makes everyone feel good, especially in this local Government.

Mr. Dodd said Mr. Holloway mentioned the poultry industry, and the Chesnicks emailed him something which they talked about at the Taste of the Eastern Shore. He said there is going to be a 2019 Poultry Industry University Partnership Summit at the Civic Center. He said it is all day from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and is free, and they encouraged Councilmembers to attend to educate themselves on that.

Mr. Holloway said many people know he buys and sells collectibles at his store, and one man brought in some things from the 1950s. He said, in June of 1953, the Governor proclaimed Fried Chicken Week, so maybe they can honor the poultry industry with a proclamation. He said they went through quite an exercise a couple years ago with the poultry industry, so maybe they can do something to honor them.

Mr. McCain said one of the main goals of introducing something like this is to provoke a thought process, and, ironically, they are inherently doing that as they sit here without realizing it. He said the whole intent is to provoke thought processes and suggestions, and not lose those thoughts, but take them and get them into their plan so they can incorporate them, and have a strategy around them.

Mr. Holloway said he is glad this is not a plan Mr. McCain wants to have adopted as a firm set in stone type thing because that kind of locks them into some things, and they do not know what is going to happen in the next two to four years, to which Mr. McCain responded, it would not be a plan if they did that. Mr. Holloway said locking it in, or voting on it, was really worrying him, to which Mr. McCain responded, these are not rules and regulations, or legislation they are trying to create, but a plan. He said it has to be flexible, and it should be flexible, but, at the same time, it should give them a roadmap and a direction. He said he would be remorse if he did not, once again, thank Mrs. Hurley for her hard work on this because she really is the one who did the hard work, so they need to thank her.

Mr. Dodd said they have always had some sort of strategic plan on Council, but he does not think it has ever been formalized into one package, to which Mr. McCain responded, everybody has a plan in their head. Mr. Dodd said Mr. McCain mentioned the individual Departments, and he thinks it is a great idea, but there are some things he does not agree with, although, for the most part, it looks good. He said, for instance, some of the goals and objectives mentioned were different allied resources the County has, such as public safety, but he did not mention them in the measures, so that is something they can talk about in the future. He said maybe having a retreat someday where they spend a couple of hours on this would be a good idea, and that way they can all put their heads together.

Mr. McCain said, in closing, he is asking the Councilmen, as well as those on the Executive side, to send their suggestions and/or concerns to Mrs. Hurley. He said they will incorporate those, and try to bring this back at another meeting with a little more finished product. He said it will probably take them a few versions to try to get to a finished product they can adopt, and then they will revisit this again in a year. Mr. Dodd said, when Mr. McCain says "adopt," that goes back to what Mr. Holloway was asking, to which Mr. McCain responded, he said adopt in theory. Mr. Cannon said he does not think it would hurt to adopt it as a Council because, as they all know, it is a plan, to which Mr. McCain responded, not as legislation. Mr. Cannon clarified, it would mean Council gives it their blessing, and where they want to go with it. Mr. Dodd said it identifies goals to look at.


Mr. Cannon said they will have another Work Session in two to four weeks, or whatever Mr. McCain thinks will work best, to which Mr. McCain responded, they would like to do it as soon as they can only because it is budget season, and that is when they should be looking at their plan the most. There was no further discussion.

Signatures on next page


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John T. Cannon, President



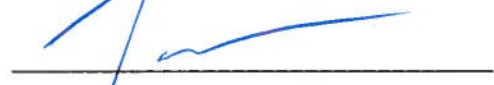
Larry W. Dodd, Vice President, District 3



Ernest F. Davis, District 1



Marc Kilmer, District 2



Josh Hastings, District 4



Joe Holloway, District 5



William R. McCain, At-Large



Laura Hurley, Council Administrator