



Governance Training and Strategic Plan Readiness Assessment

Roles, Responsibilities, and Collaborative Commission Leadership



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335+ Consulting Resources
and 38 Years Serving the
Public Sector

Inspiring Local Government to Transform and Innovate

BerryDunn has an in-depth understanding of the operations, business processes, and systems required to provide services to the public, partnering agencies, and internal stakeholders.

This understanding was gained through our work with more than 625 state, local, and quasi-governmental clients across the country, as well as through our team members' prior work in various roles across state and local government.

Purpose

- ▲ To understand governance, roles, responsibilities, and relationships
- ▲ Build strong relationships within the Commission and learn to work collaboratively as a unified body
- ▲ Recognize ethical and legal responsibilities in decision-making

Outcome: To provide an assessment on the readiness of the city for the strategic planning process

Governance Overview

- ▲ Governance is the structures, processes, and practices used to make decisions and manage the city's affairs
- ▲ Governance ensures accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in public service
- ▲ Governance promotes trust and legitimacy in the eye of the public



What is
governance?

Why does
governance
matter?

Roles and Responsibilities of the City Commission



Roles

Policy Making

Develop, review, and approve ordinances and policies that guide Traverse City

Oversight

Monitor the implementation of ordinances and policies and ensure accountability

Representation

Represent the interests of constituents

Advocacy

Champion causes that align with City vision and needs of the whole community



Responsibilities

Fiduciary

Stewardship of resources

Adherence

Follow legal and ethical standards

Acting

Maintain the public's best interest, not self-interest, or the interest of only a few

City Commission Ethics and Accountability

Ethical Standards for Elected Officials and Accountability Mechanisms

Ethical Standards

- Conflict of interest disclosure and management
- Transparency openness in decision-making
- Adherence to codes of conduct and ethics

Accountability Mechanisms

- Regular reporting to the public
- Performance reviews and audits
- Ensuring legal compliance such as public meeting laws, anti-corruption policy



Source: State of Michigan ethics law, ICMA Guide for Local Elected Leaders

City Commission Fiduciary Responsibilities

Legal Responsibilities of the Commission



Duty of Care. Act prudently and with due diligence in decision-making.



Duty of Loyalty. Put the city's interests above personal interests and the interests of a few.



Duty of Obedience. Ensure the Commission complies with laws, regulations, and commission policies.



Avoid liability by staying informed and adhering to your responsibilities.

Role of the Mayor

Facilitates Commission meetings

Serves as Presiding Officer and maintains order and decorum

Votes on all matters

Elected as the Mayor

Leads with neutrality

Promotes collaboration



Relationship Between the Commission and City Management

Roles of the Commission



City Commission

Sets vision,
mission, and
strategic goals

Adopts ordinances
and policy

Relationship Between the Commission and City Management

Roles of the City Management

Executes the Commission's vision, mission and strategic goals

Carries out policy and enforces city ordinances

Manages day-to-day operations

Relationship Between the Commission and City Management

Comparison of Roles Commission vs. Management

City Commission

- Sets vision, mission, and strategic goals
- Adopts ordinances and policy

City Management

- Executes the Commission's vision, mission and strategic goals
- Carries out policy and enforces city ordinances
- Manages day-to-day operations



Relationship Between the Commission and City Management

Effective Commission-Management Dynamics



Regular, defined collaboration framework



Set clear boundaries



Mutual trust and respect



Understand each other's roles to avoid micromanagement

Effective City Commission Collaboration

Collaboration

Principles of Teamwork



- Open and respectful communication
- Active listening
- Inclusive discussions
- Collective decision-making
- Conflict resolution

Common Challenges



- Personal conflicts
- Political disagreements
- Competing priorities
- Split Commission

How to Overcome



- Establish shared vision and strategic goals
- Keep discussions issue-focused, not personal
- Foster a culture of trust and respect
- Uphold the vote of the Commission

Collaboration promotes the exchange of diverse ideas and skills. Keeping discussions issue focused leads to innovative and efficient problem solving and solutions.

Building Positive Relationships Between Commission Members

Importance of Cohesiveness

- Trust and collaboration lead to more effective governance
- Diversity of thought enriches decision-making
- Conduct effective commission meetings

Strategies for Relationship Building

- Regular commission retreats and development activities
- Transparent communication
- Recognize and respect individual contributions



Conducting Effective Commission Meetings



Preparation

Set clear agendas, review packet and identify concerns in advance

Set framework for questions to be addressed in advance



Active Listening

Encourage participation, maintain focus, and manage time



Decision-Making Process

Consensus-building
Use voting protocols and structured decorum



Follow-up

Ensure decisions are documented and followed through
Stand by decisions of the commission, even if you disagree



Resources: Roberts Rules of Order, The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure, Rules of the City Commission, *Mastering Council Meetings*, by Jurassic Parliament™

Conflict Resolution within the Commission

Causes

- Personal disagreements
- Power struggles
- Different priorities

Prevention Tools

- Clear, defined communication channels
- Ground rules for discussions

Steps to Resolve

- Address issues early before they escalate
- Establish and focus on shared vision and strategic goals
- Mediation with third-party facilitation

Common Causes and Tools for Conflict Prevention



Readiness for Strategic Planning



- ▲ Strategic Planning readiness assessments determine how capable the City is of undertaking a strategic planning effort and whether additional capacity is needed.

Keys to a Successful Strategic Planning Process

Organizational Readiness

- Determine if the Commission is prepared, has capacity, and is ready to focus thought and action on remedying issues before strategic planning begins.

Sponsorship and Participation

- Make sure the Commission is willing to devote the time needed to discuss what is truly important to the community and organization. The Commission serves as sponsor of and legitimizes the strategic planning process.

Leadership and Support

- Support City Management, who serves as your strategic planning champion, who understands the process and is committed to ensuring all stakeholders come together and focus on what is important.



Keys to a Successful Strategic Planning Process

Build Common Understanding

- Clearly communicate the purpose of the process to all stakeholders.
- Engage in analysis and discussion to build understanding of the organization, its current state, and possible strategic choices.

Decision Making and Implementation

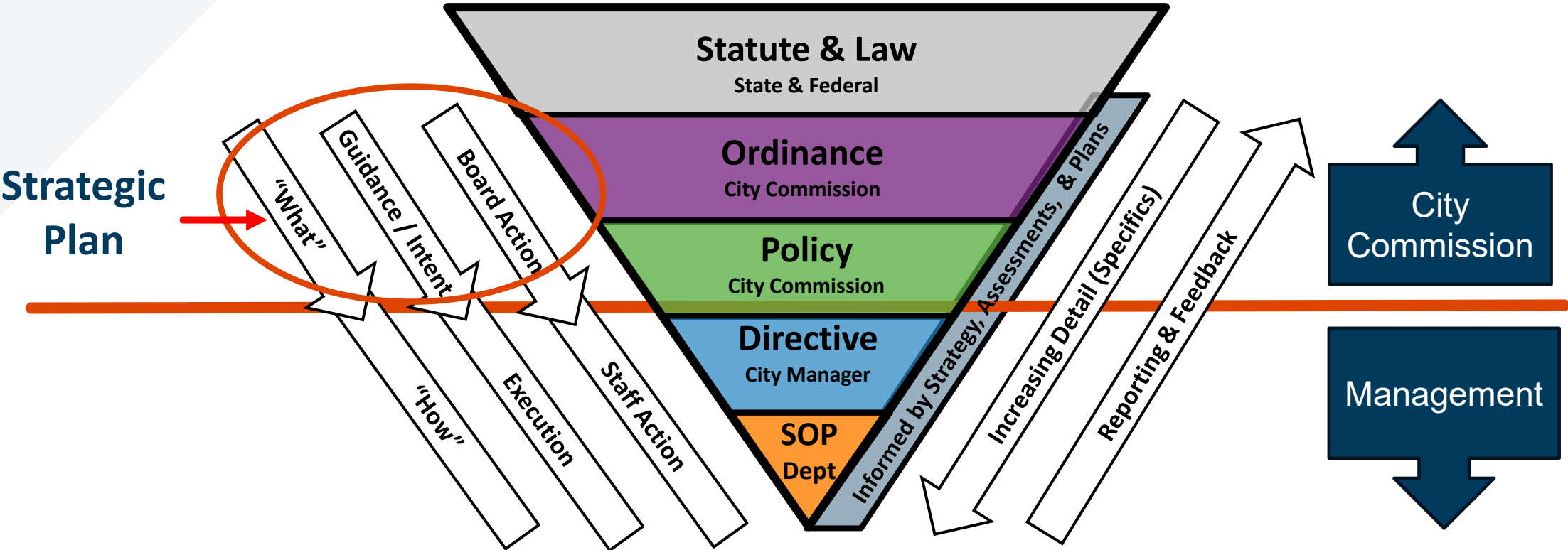
- Align the strategic plan to resource allocation and connect the city budget
- Connect city operations to the strategic plan

Design for Success

- Take into consideration existing planning, management, efforts, and routines to create a strategic planning process unique to Traverse City
- Set realistic expectations to accomplish strategic planning while also accommodating day-to-day demand of staff













Policy-Making Framework



Organizational Readiness

Should we proceed with the Strategic Planning Process?

  
Yes Maybe No

Question	Response
Has the City Commission agreed to sponsor and support the process?	
Is the City Manager ready to champion the process?	 
Are the resources of time and commitment available to do the planning?	 
Will we commit to implementing the plan and linking to the budget and operational efficiencies?	 
Will the process will create value for the community and city organization?	
Is now is the right time to initiate the process?	 



Observation

Commission and Management roles, and responsibilities need clearer definition and adherence to policy legislative frameworks.

Findings

There is insufficient understanding of the roles and responsibilities between the commission and management, which is leading to delays in decision-making and micro-managing operational functions.

Existing policies and legislative frameworks are out of date, not consistently followed, and potentially lead to non-compliance with legal and ethical standards.

Without clear policy and adherence to roles, it is difficult to hold the appropriate parties accountable for actions, decisions, and compliance with legislative mandates.

Observation

Communication between the Commission and Management is fractured and lacks proper boundaries.

Finding

Communication between Commissioners that lacks policy legislative structure, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent information flow, hampers cohesive decision making.

There are insufficient communication delineations between Commissioners and Management, leading to blurred boundaries that creates confusion about authority and responsibilities, and increases the risk of the Commission overstepping Management's operational oversight.

The lack of clear, structured communication and boundaries negatively impacts organizational efficiency, delaying key decisions, and leading to operational dysfunction.

Observation

There is a lack of trust between Commissioners and a lack of trust between Commission and Management.

Finding

A lack of trust between Commissioners has created an environment of discord, reducing the board's ability to collaborate effectively and make timely, unified decisions.

The lack of trust between the Commission and Management creates barriers to fostering mutual respect, second-guessing each other's motives and intentions, and hindering the alignment of strategic goals.

The perceived distrust between Commissioners and between Commission and Management can weaken the confidence of the community, city employees, and city stakeholders, impacting morale and affecting the city reputation and performance.

Observation

The organization lacks a clear strategic focus, resulting in an environment where everything is a priority

Finding

The absence of a strategic plan and focused priorities has led to the overextension of resources, with management spread too thin across multiple initiatives, reducing effectiveness and impact.

Decision-making is inconsistent and reactive, preventing the city from advancing toward long-term goals or achieving progress in critical service delivery.

Treating all issues as equally urgent results in key strategic initiatives being delayed, as there is no mechanism to prioritize high-impact projects over less critical tasks.

Strategic Planning Organizational Readiness Memo

- BerryDunn worked with the Traverse City Commission and Management to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges around an effective and successful strategic planning process. The readiness assessment project is divided into three phases and includes transition from BerryDunn's work to the City's strategic planning consultant, FutureIQ.



Organizational Readiness

Should we proceed with the Strategic Planning Process?

The risks associated with engaging in Strategic Planning when the organization is not ready include:

- Lack of cohesion and failure to reflect true priorities
- Implementation and key deliverables may be delayed or fail altogether.
- Lack of buy-in can cause a potential derail goal achievement
- Lack of trust and communication will continue to foster Commission conflicts
- Strategic planning, in the absence of readiness, trust, and strong communication can lead to a failed plan, missed opportunity and long-term organizational decline.

BerryDunn recommendations that the City **proceed with caution** on the strategic planning process until stability, trust, and effective communication is established between the Commission, as a policy making body, and Commission and Management collaboration is improved



Recommendations for the City

Organize a Commission Teambuilding Retreat

To strengthen relationships, improve trust and build camaraderie among commission members.

Key elements and benefit of teambuilding:

Understand Commission dynamics and leadership styles

Collaborate in an effective and professional manner

Communication with clear and unified goals as an elected body

Create a sense of stability for the community and management



Recommendations for the City

Update Rules of the City Commission

To establish clear policy guidelines for professional conduct and communication to maintain a respectful and productive environment

Key elements and benefit of the Policy:

Code of Conduct to set standards for ethical behavior, mutual respect, and integrity

Conflict Resolution Mechanism to outline steps to handle disagreements or conflicts constructively

Communication Protocols to define how Commission members should communicate

Reduce misunderstandings, prevent conflicts, and ensure accountability



Key Takeaways



Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of the City Commission



Importance of collaboration and communication



Legal and ethical duties of the Commission



Strategies for effective teamwork and decision-making



Strategic planning, establishing a vision and setting strategic priorities are paramount to success

The value of ongoing governance learning and continuous improvement is key to City Commission effectiveness and achieving its vision and strategic goals

