



STATE OF THE CITY REPORT

JULY 2011

The following is a statement about the State of the City from the perspective of the City Manager as of the end of Fiscal Year 2011.

Achievements:

- **Financial Recovery and Transparency** – Due to the work of the Financial Advisory Board, the city will retire the deficit at the end of FY 2011, two years ahead of schedule and will begin to establish reserves. The Staff Accountant now has many financial processes under control, creating financial transparency in the City. Policies are coming together; procedures and guidelines are being written. Maintaining compliance with the policies and procedures will increase the reliability of the financial reporting and reduce the costs of Auditors as we will be in a position to generate our own financial statements as an exercise in FY 11 and in real time in FY 12. All but one of the material findings in the audit has been addressed.

The City now has a capital plan, though not yet fully funded. A new reserves policy will assure that funding the City's capital needs is no longer neglected in order to meet operating costs.

- **Permit Streamlining** – The four departments responsible for various aspect of permitting have been combined into two functions. The Department of Public Safety handles all aspect of Fire safety, building inspection and will add health and minimum housing standards in early FY 2012. The Zoning office manages the remainder of the permits. The permit process is streamlined and cooperative so that customers do not see handoffs between the two departments and most transactions occur at the clerk's window with little need for delay. Larger projects are managed by the Fire Marshall and staff in a manner that customers report being helped through the process and supported by City staff.
- **Downtown Revitalization** – The reconstituted Winooski Community Partnership (WCP) is now conducting and supporting ongoing events Downtown. This includes a branding effort for DWTN Winooski. Opportunities Credit Union and Kasini House also sponsored a PopUp Art Gallery District in the empty store fronts proving that small retail works on the only area of the downtown not filled with thriving businesses.

One concern from residents is that the City staff spends too much time working on the downtown. In reality, the downtown, like our parks, pool, community center, senior center, and library are places that citizens share. By making the downtown a desirable place where people can gather and participate in activities or shop, then the rationale for working on the downtown makes sense and is a wise investment.

The investment is paying off with the addition of over 100 high tech jobs moving into the Champlain Mill this winter with the purchase of the building by MyWebGrocer. Redstone has renovated and leased over 90% of the Lavallee and Ide building – now home to the CCRPC and CCMPO, Fuse Marketing, and Reading Plus. Many homes and store fronts have been renovated adding to the "buzz" about Winooski.

In addition, the Boston Globe named Winooski a destination for travel in their "One Tank of Gas" travel section on July 27, 2011. Winooski is becoming a summer destination for restaurants and special events.

- **Cost Containment** – The City has reduced structural (recurring) expenses significantly in both benefit cost reduction and the number of staff. While this was necessary, some position cuts may not be sustainable over time. The strategic planning process (see Immediate Challenges) will help inform the Council on where and how to address the loss of services that may be important to our citizens.
- **Clear Decision-Making** - The Council is continuing to become well informed of city issues, making sure decisions are well documented and elected officials are well aware of issues behind certain decisions. The oversight process is working well. Councilors will rotate through multiple divisions of the City in the next few years, adding a broader view of issues to match the depth that currently exists.
- **Community Involvement and Cooperation** – Reconstituted boards and commissions are beginning to meet. The City and the School are working together on many issues including the Strategic Planning Process. The City is currently working directly with the school and its consultants on the School improvement plan focusing on the Community Involvement mandate.
- **Permitting and State Designation** – The Designated Downtown renewal is complete. The designation will last for the next five years and will make training and consultation services available to the Winooski Community Partnership. Financial resources are also available for transportation funding and for tax credits for developers.

An Act 250 permit allowing for events in the Meadow at Casavant Park is being pursued.

Immediate Challenges:

- **Strategic Planning Process** – The City has no touchstone for determining how to invest resources. Decisions have been made based on crises or opportunities presented. The current process will take two or three years to mature. A careful plan must be developed in the meantime to create focus. A lack of focus at this point will result in burnout of staff and volunteers and a sense of doing many things partially well. It is critical by the next budget cycle that the Council meet with data collected from the Strategic Planning Steering Committee to select areas targeted for development.
- **Policies and Procedures** – The City has chosen to develop and formalize policies and procedures after implementing changes - in effect, "writing down what we already do". As a result, staff often struggle to find time to write. This must be a priority in order to have written documents that match our processes for audit purposes and for assuring continued compliance.
- **Twenty First Century Skills** – Governments are notorious late adopters of technology and new techniques. Largely built to comply and to assure compliance, processes are often labor intensive and slow to adapt to technology and innovation. Expectations of staff in the private sector have not entered most governmental organizations. Raising expectations, training, upgrading technology, increasing expectations and providing management training are needed to move forward. This effort needs to be measured in increased productivity and flexibility, communication with citizens and business owners, and community involvement.
- **Community Services and Community Building** – The City continues to struggle with programming for citizens. Recreation and service programs are mostly funded by donations and foundations that are never secured from year to year. Often, the end of the year brings "surprises" in funding gaps made up out of the general fund. This year, our VISTA worker began

the process of standardizing our approach. Our arrangement with the Y for organizing programs has not reached maturity at this time. Measurable results should be made clear should we choose to continue this relationship.

The Strategic Planning Process should yield some helpful information in this area. The City must develop a child strategy and a "family" strategy. The Senior Citizens are working on a plan for their future. The remaining adults with no children (19 – 35 and 44 – 65) are a growing part of the population and have a need to connect with each other as neighbors. New Americans have a strong need for assistance as they learn to navigate this country's culture.

Not all of the above issues will be addressed in the context of City government. Other groups are emerging as catalysts for meeting these needs. The Winooski Coalition for a Safe and Peaceful Community, The Vermont Refugee Resettlement Center, Vermont Works for Women, The Winooski Family Center, the area churches and mosque, Association of Africans Living in Vermont, the State Refugee Information Network, all play a role in assisting with services. Coordination and focus are needed to increase the effectiveness of the efforts.

Approved by the Winooski City Council on August 15, 2011