

**August 13, 2012**

**To: Mayor, City Council, City Administrator, and Focus Session Participants**

**From: Dr. Curtis Wood, Strategic Planning Facilitator**

**Subject: Results of Strategic Planning Focus Sessions**

### **Introduction**

On August 9 and 10 I facilitated four strategic planning focus sessions that included 33 participants. The city administrator attended the four sessions. The first focus session included two large-business owners and the second focus session included five small-business owners. The third focus session included 15 persons that sit on East Moline municipal boards and commissions, and the fourth focus session included 11 community leaders that represented East Moline neighborhood groups as well as K-12 teachers, school administrators, and a school board member. Each focus session lasted approximately two hours. In this Report, I describe the individual and aggregate results of the four focus sessions.

The participants in the four focus sessions were asked to conduct a SWOT analysis that involved brainstorming municipal organizational (internal) strengths (s) and weaknesses (W) and community, regional, and national (external) opportunities (O) and threats (T) to the City of East Moline. The results of the SWOT analysis served as a basis for the focus session participants to identify, discuss, and prioritize strategic (broad and multi-year) goals that would make it possible to reduce or eliminate internal weaknesses and external threats and/or take advantage of or build upon internal strengths and external opportunities. Focus session participants prioritized the identified strategic goals by using the red dot method. Each participant was given five red dots to allocate across their highest priority strategic goals; however, participants could place no more

than two dots on any strategic goal. Therefore, the overall priority of a strategic goal is directly related to the number of red dots placed on that strategic goal.

### **Results of Each Focus Session**

#### **Focus Session 1: Large-Business Owners (2 participants)**

SWOT Analysis: Below are the list of internal organizational strengths and weaknesses and the external (community, regional, national) opportunities and threats (challenges, constraints) to the City of East Moline that were identified by the participants in the first focus session. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are not listed in order of priority.

#### *Strengths (internal)*

- Long-term work force that has resulted in much experience and expertise
- City employees have much pride in their work
- The city uses modern equipment across all departments
- City has a long term vision and a commitment to making plans and acting upon the vision and plans
- The mayor is very responsive
- City employees are responsive, efficient, and effective
- City uses a disciplined and controlled approach when managing organizational finances

#### *Weaknesses (internal)*

- Some city council members micro-manage city staff at all levels
- There does not appear to be any succession planning
- The AFSCME union is too inflexible and unbending; therefore, too unrealistic
- CEDS is too limited in that economic development projects and equipment are not included. Thus, CEDS cannot be used by the Bi-state Regional Commission
- There is no long term financial forecast of capital improvement program
- No city strategies to increase citizen engagement or volunteers to serve on city boards/commissions or elective office
- The city allows irresponsible or unqualified developers to start projects in the city

#### *Opportunities (external)*

- About half of the 2,200 acres of newly annexed property (I80/I88 corridor) is available to be developed
- Civic associations such as the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs are involved in the beautification of the city and providing scholarships to East Moline citizens

- City officials have strong ties to officials in other cities, the schools, the county, the state, and national government
- There is a diversity of businesses in terms of size and type of business

*Threats (external)*

- Lack of partnerships between the city and businesses with regard to city beautification
- Too many school districts that result in excessive governmental expenditures and property taxes
- Too much rivalry between the city and other governmental bodies in the Quad Cities despite the existence of a regional chamber of Commerce and the Bi-state Regional Commission
- Too much blighted property in the city
- The poor state fiscal situation and pension problems have adversely affected city finances by late disbursements (\$1.4 million)
- Poor appearance of city entryways, thoroughfares
- Irrational organized opposition to economic development by some residents

Strategic Goals: The focus session participants identified eight (8) strategic goals that would, if included in the City of East Moline 2013-2017 Strategic Plan, make it possible to reduce or eliminate internal weaknesses and external threats and/or take advantage of or build upon internal strengths and external opportunities. The eight strategic goals are listed in order of priority based upon the outcome of the red-dot prioritization exercise.

*Strategic Goals (in order of priority):*

- Increase partnerships between the city and other cities and the county by sharing equipment and services (2 red dots)
- Conduct an ongoing/annual review of strategic goals (2 red dots)
- City should develop a regional compost plan (2 red dots)
- Develop a long range (5 years) financial plan (1 red dot)
- Develop a comprehensive 5-year capital improvement program (1 red dot)
- Develop a plan to improve and maintain city streetscapes and entryways by involving citizens and community groups (1 red dot)
- Develop/improve partnerships with businesses (1 red dot)
- Develop a city employee engagement (participation) program (0 red dots)

## **Focus Session 2: Small-Business Owners (5 participants)**

SWOT Analysis: Below are the list of internal organizational strengths and weaknesses and the external (community, regional, national) opportunities and threats (challenges, constraints) to the City of East Moline that were identified by the participants in the second focus session. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are not listed in order of priority.

### *Strengths (internal)*

- City staff worked well with businesses with regard to coordinating the focus sessions
- The Inspection Department efficiently and effectively brought codes up-to-date
- The sanitation city employees go the extra mile by picking up garbage left on the street
- The performance of the sanitation, police, and fire employees is of high quality
- Elected city officials are in touch and know the citizens they represent
- City officials appreciate the city's history
- The Engineering Department is top-notch

### *Weaknesses (internal)*

- There is lack of consistency (continuity) between mayors and councils over time with regard to the downtown area
- There is no strategic plan that includes a vision and mission statement or strategic goals
- There is lack of mayoral leadership with regard to the creation of a vision and action to implement the vision
- City staff do not pursue grants
- Some city workers do not care about their performance
- City officials do not show up at city functions or community events
- Food permits should not be required for non profit groups/functions
- City employees have a sense of entitlement; thus, they are not as accountable as they should be
- City employees are resistant to change. They do not want to rock the boat and prefer to do things "the way we have always done it"
- The financial condition of the water utility is poor. City water rates are too high (tripled during the last 10 years)
- The city is not aggressive in recruiting businesses as are neighboring cities
- The city does not offer financial incentives for economic development
- The city does not fully participate in regional economic development institutions and initiatives

### *Opportunities (external)*

- Good source of laborers in the city
- There is affordable rental space (commercial/retail) in the city
- Real estate is affordable in the city that creates the opportunity for housing expansion
- The new Western Illinois University Campus creates the opportunity for growth and development
- There is a diverse culture and languages in the city population
- The Riverfront area provides an opportunity for growth and development
- The cost of living is relatively low in the city

### *Threats (external)*

- There is the perception that the city is a second class citizen to other cities in the region
- The economy is poor in terms of consumer demand
- There is a lack of locally-based businesses
- There is a lack of hotels/motels in the city
- There is a small tax base in East Moline; therefore, the property tax rate is too high for all units of government
- The small city population reduces the opportunity for economic growth
- There is a lack of cultural/recreational activities in the city

Strategic Goals: The focus session participants identified eight (8) strategic goals that would, if included in the City of East Moline 2013-2017 Strategic Plan, make it possible to reduce or eliminate internal weaknesses and external threats and/or take advantage of or build upon internal strengths and external opportunities. The eight strategic goals are listed in order of priority based upon the outcome of the red-dot prioritization exercise.

### *Strategic Goals (in order of priority):*

- Identify venues and strategies that would turn the city into a destination city (4 red dots)
- Develop a plan to grow the city financially, economically, culturally, socially, and physically (3 red dots)
- Plan and develop the Riverfront property to complement the WIU Quad Cities campus (3 red dots)
- Develop a plan to create a more positive image of the city (3 red dots)
- Develop Jacobs Park (3 red dots)
- Plan and develop the I80/I88 corridor (2 red dots)
- Develop a plan to hold big events to put the city on the map (1 red dot)

- Develop a feasibility study regarding the best way to own/manage/operate the water utility (0 red dots)

### **Focus Session 3: Members on City Boards and Commissions (15 participants)**

SWOT Analysis: Below are the list of internal organizational strengths and weaknesses and the external (community, regional, national) opportunities and threats (challenges, constraints) to the City of East Moline that were identified by the participants in focus session 3. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are not listed in order of priority.

#### *Strengths (internal)*

- City departments work well together
- There is an organizational culture of continual improvement and responsiveness (accountability) to elected officials and the community
- There is strong mayoral leadership. The Mayor is dedicated and appears at community functions and events
- The fire and police departments are well-led, and reflect a positive image to citizens/youth
- The city staff provides sufficient information to the Board of Zoning Appeals so they can make good decisions
- The library staff is very professional
- There is professionalism in the Finance, Engineering, and Building Inspection Departments
- The selection of Board and Commission members are based on expertise and not politics
- There is strong leadership and dedication by persons serving on city Boards and Commissions
- The Public Works Department provides effective and efficient assistance to the Park Board
- The Public Works Department also provides excellent snow removal services
- There is long tenure of middle management in all city departments that provides for continuity and expertise

#### *Weaknesses (internal)*

- City is not a home rule city
- The city is losing experienced members of Boards and Commissions, elected officials, and city staff
- There is no economic development director
- There is no city grant writer
- Positions have been consolidated, thus reducing program and service effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity
- The city website is too limited and not transparent
- The city council does not focus enough on downtown events and issues. Organizations and businesses have to pay for food permits and police security; codes and ordinances affecting

the downtown are too “hefty”(strict and constraining)

- City does not recognize/appreciate the strengths of the neighborhoods
- City officials are not mindful or sensitive to the diversity of the city population
- City services and economic development initiatives are not equally distributed across all neighborhoods
- There is no organized effort to preserve historic buildings
- The Police Department is not community oriented enough and there is a lack of professionalism in the Police Department

#### *Opportunities (external)*

- The necessary local leadership exists to recruit, educate, and cultivate in the younger generation a sense of civic-mindedness and social responsibility
- East Moline has a diverse population, but the city population is small enough so there is sufficient homogeneity in the population
- The Riverfront property
- Western Illinois University
- The newly annexed developable land in the I80/I 88 corridor

#### *Threats (external)*

- Some East Moline citizens and business owners are opposed to economic growth (change in general) and fight new business development
- Some East Moline citizens are opposed to home rule for East Moline
- The Illinois EPA and transportation departments are inefficient and ineffective in that they are slow to act or respond to the felt needs of East Moline
- There is a lack of state and federal funding
- The development of the Riverfront is a threat to the revitalization of the Downtown
- Property taxes for the schools are too high
- There is too much competition and conflict between cities in the Quad Cities
- The county and state political climate
- There is too much municipal fragmentation in the region (too many cities)

Strategic Goals: The focus session participants identified ten (10) strategic goals that would, if included in the City of East Moline 2013-2017 Strategic Plan, make it possible to reduce or eliminate internal weaknesses and external threats and/or take advantage of or build upon internal strengths and external opportunities. The 10 strategic goals are listed in order of priority based upon the outcome of the red-dot prioritization exercise.

*Strategic Goals (in order of priority):*

- Develop a plan to educate citizens (includes students, members of civic clubs, and those in their 30s-40s) as to how city government works and the services provided; involve citizens; and recruit citizens to volunteer for Boards and Commissions and run for elective office (13 red dots)
- Conduct a study and develop a plan to enhance economic development in the city (11 red dots)
- Develop a downtown revitalization plan (10 red dots)
- Become a home rule city (10 red dots)
- Develop a plan to fill key municipal positions that make it possible to better promote economic and community development (10 red dots)
- Improve communication and coordination between municipal Boards and Commissions (8 red dots)
- Develop a detailed comprehensive plan for the city that includes land use, zoning, economic development, and infrastructure improvement (7 red dots)
- Study whether to consolidate government services with other municipalities in the region (6 red dots)
- Develop a plan that makes it possible for East Moline to become the # 1 industrial development city in the Quad Cities (2 red dots)
- Develop the River Front (2 red dots)

**Focus Session 4: Community Leaders (11 participants)**

SWOT Analysis: Below are the list of internal organizational strengths and weaknesses and the external (community, regional, national) opportunities and threats (challenges, constraints) to the City of East Moline that were identified by the community leaders in the fourth focus group. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are not listed in order of priority.

*Strengths (internal)*

- Take charge city department heads, particularly the Fire Chief and the Police Chief
- The Mayor and City Council have a strong commitment to the community
- The Public Works Department is effective and efficient at sweeping streets, street maintenance, and garbage collection
- City is blessed with a strong cadre of volunteers
- City officials are approachable, responsive, and accountable
- Police and fire officials cooperate with surrounding cities
- The city has a program for housing assistance to first-time home buyers

### *Weaknesses (internal)*

- Too few city employees and funding for roads and neighborhoods
- No full time economic director
- No full-time Parks and Recreation Director; thus, lack of park leadership
- Lack of funding for Parks and Recreation
- Lack of park and recreation programs (For example, no summer youth program)
- Lack of upkeep/maintenance of parks
- No opportunity for civic groups to adopt a park
- Lack of support for arts/culture that could be included in the Parks and Recreation Department
- Not enough support for community events by some Aldermen
- Aldermen too focused on their ward, not city-at-large
- Collective bargaining agreements are too restrictive. For example, city officials may not hire seasonal employees
- Lack of city funding for a façade program
- Lack of building and code enforcement along the Avenue of the Cities
- Lack of enforcement of neighborhood aesthetics

### *Opportunities (external)*

- The Riverfront
- The Downtown
- The I80/I88 corridor
- Western Illinois University
- Support from federal elected officials, including grant funds
- The Bi-state Regional Commission
- The diversity of the city population (including non-English speaking population)
- Tourism
- Affordable housing
- There exists much collaboration between school and city officials
- High quality schools
- Great volunteers
- Living lands and water
- River Action Group, a non-profit
- Avenue of the Cities

### *Threats (external)*

- Decreasing/lack of state and federal funding
- Increasing poverty in the city
- Declining city and regional economy

- Poor condition of the roads and sidewalks as well as entryways
- Poor public image of East Moline

Strategic Goals: The focus session participants identified nine (9) strategic goals that would, if included in the City of East Moline 2013-2017 Strategic Plan, make it possible to reduce or eliminate internal weaknesses and external threats and/or take advantage of or build upon internal strengths and external opportunities. The nine strategic goals are listed in order of priority based upon the outcome of the red-dot prioritization exercise.

*Strategic Goals (in order of priority):*

- Develop a plan to enhance /improve all major city traffic corridors (10 red dots)
- Develop/improve city infrastructure to promote business/economic development (8 red dots)
- Create durable partnerships with community resources such as volunteers, the schools, churches, environmental groups, and arts groups to maximize the efficient and effective use of financial, human, and technical resources (8 red dots)
- Assist East Moline citizens to develop a more positive self-image (7 red dots)
- Develop a plan to create an environment to enhance educational achievement/opportunities, economic growth, social opportunities, culture/arts and park/recreational activities, and spiritual nourishment (6 red dots)
- Encourage the development of the Quarter to maximize the use of the Riverfront (3 red dots)
- Develop a plan/policy to provide financial incentives for economic development initiatives (1 red dot)
- Hire a fulltime city planner in order to attract tourism and new business (idea written down by a participant but not brought up in group discussion)
- Celebrate East Moline history (idea written down by a participant but not brought up in group discussion)

### **Aggregate Results of the Four Focus Sessions**

In this section of the Report I analyze the aggregate results of the focus sessions with regard to the SWOT analyses and the identification and prioritization of strategic goals.

#### SWOT Analyses

*Internal Strengths and Weaknesses:* Focus session participants are generally complimentary toward professional staff and the elected officials. The participants consider most city staff to be committed to their work, professional, and responsive to the public. Elected officials are also

generally considered to be effective leaders and committed to serving the public. However, focus session participants identified more internal weaknesses than internal strengths (33 internal strengths and 46 internal weaknesses). Internal weaknesses that are mentioned in more than one focus session included the following:

- Program/service effectiveness and efficiency has been reduced by eliminating/consolidating position. Many focus session participants felt there should be a full-time economic development director, grants writer, parks and recreation director, Examples include the loss of an economic Development Director, the absence of a grants writer, and too few employees for maintaining roads and neighborhoods
- The city is losing experienced members on city boards and commissions, governing body, and city staff, and there does not appear to be a succession plan in place
- The city does not have a long term vision or mission embodied in a strategic plan, a financial plan, and a comprehensive capital improvement plan
- City officials (elected and appointed) do not show up at or focus enough attention toward community and downtown events and issues
- Collective bargaining agreements with AFSCME are too restrictive
- Some city employees are resistant to change, have a sense of entitlement, and do not care about their performance
- City does not offer financial incentives for economic development initiatives such as a façade building program
- Lack of city enforcement of building codes

*External Opportunities and External Threats (Challenges):* The focus session participants identified 31 external opportunities and 28 external threats (challenges). Commonly mentioned external opportunities (actual or potential) included the following:

- The I80/I88 corridor
- The Riverfront
- The Downtown
- Western Illinois University
- The diversity of the East Moline citizens
- Affordable housing and property
- City officials have strong ties with school and federal officials
- City is blessed with a cadre of volunteers and civic associations that are civic-minded

There are seven (7) external threats (challenges) mentioned by participants across the focus sessions:

- Lack of or decreasing funding from the state and federal governments
- Some organized citizens and businesses oppose efforts to bring in new business that can promote economic development and growth
- The declining local and regional economy and increasing poverty in the city
- There is too much rivalry between the city and other municipal governments in the Quad Cities
- Local government property taxes are too high primarily due to the small property and sales tax base
- East Moline has a poor image in the eyes of citizens and government officials across the Quad Cities region
- There is a poor appearance and condition of the city entryways and thoroughfares

### Strategic Goals

In this section I have organized the 35 strategic goals identified by the participants in the four focus groups into four general themes: 1) Community and Economic Development; 2) City Governance and Administration; 3) Inter governmental Coordination, Consolidation; and 4) Long Range Planning. There are 151 red dots allocated by the 33 focus session participants across the 35 strategic goals. I have indicated the total number of red dots allocated for each theme. I have also indicated the number of red dots allocated for each strategic goal within each theme, in descending order.

#### *1) Community and Economic Development (91 Total Red Dots):*

Conduct a study and develop a plan to enhance economic development in the city (11 dots)

Develop a downtown revitalization plan (10 red dots)

Develop a plan to enhance /improve all major city traffic corridors (10 red dots)

Develop a plan to fill key municipal positions that make it possible to better promote economic and community development (10 red dots)

Develop/improve city infrastructure to promote business/economic development (8 red dots)

Develop a detailed comprehensive plan for the city that includes land use, zoning, economic development, and infrastructure improvement (7 red dots)

Develop a plan to create an environment to enhance educational achievement/opportunities, economic growth, social opportunities, culture/arts and park/recreational activities, and spiritual nourishment (6 red dots)

Plan and develop the Riverfront property to complement the WIU Quad Cities campus (5 red dots)

Identify venues and strategies that would turn the city into a destination city (4 red dots)

Develop a plan to grow the city financially, economically, culturally, socially, and physically (3 red dots)

Develop a plan to create a more positive image of the city (3 red dots)

Encourage the development of the Quarter to maximize the use of the Riverfront (3 red dots)

Develop Jacobs Park (3 red dots)

Plan and develop the I80/I88 corridor (2 red dots)

Develop a plan that makes it possible for East Moline to become the # 1 industrial development city in the Quad Cities (2 red dots)

Develop a plan to improve and maintain city streetscapes and entryways by involving citizens and community groups (1 red dot)

Develop/improve partnerships with businesses (1 red dot)

Develop a plan to hold big events to put the city on the map (1 red dot)

Develop a plan/policy to provide financial incentives for economic development initiatives (1 red dot)

Hire a fulltime city planner in order to attract tourism and new business (idea written down by a participant but not brought up in group discussion)

## *2) City Governance and Administration (46 Total Red Dots):*

Develop a plan to educate citizens (includes students, members of civic clubs, and those in their 30s-40s) as to how city government works and the services provided; involve citizens; and recruit citizens to volunteer for Boards and Commissions and run for elective office (13 red dots)

Become a home rule city (10 red dots)

Improve communication and coordination between municipal Boards and Commissions (8 red dots)

Create durable partnerships with community resources such as volunteers, the schools, churches, environmental groups, and arts groups to maximize the efficient and effective use of financial, human, and technical resources (8 red dots)

Assist East Moline citizens to develop a more positive self-image (7 red dots)

Develop a feasibility study regarding the best way to own/manage/operate the water utility (0 red dots)

Develop a city employee engagement (participation) program (0 red dots)

Celebrate East Moline history (idea written down by a participant but not brought up in group discussion)

*3) Inter-governmental Coordination, Consolidation (10 Total Red Dots):*

Study whether to consolidate government services with other municipalities in the region (6 red dots)

Increase partnerships between the city and other cities and the county by sharing equipment and services (2 red dots)

City should develop a regional compost plan (2 red dots)

*4) Long Range Planning (4 Total Red Dots):*

Conduct an ongoing/annual review of strategic goals (2 red dots)

Develop a long range (5 years) financial plan (1 red dot)

Develop a comprehensive 5-year capital improvement program (1 red dot)

## **Conclusion**

I applaud the Mayor, City Council, and City Administration for embarking upon the creation of a strategic plan and including focus sessions in the strategic planning process. The results of the four focus sessions should be shared with the Mayor, City Council, City staff, focus session participants, and interested citizens prior to the first strategic planning session to be held in September or early October. The Mayor, City Council, and City Administration should also consider the ideas from the 33 focus session participants during the upcoming strategic planning session. Including the felt needs and priorities of these important community stakeholders will make it more likely that the 2013-2017 City of East Moline Strategic Plan will be seen as legitimate; thus, sustainable. The Mayor, City Council, and City Administration should also involve the focus session participants and other interested citizens when developing objectives and strategies for achieving strategic goals and assessing progress made.

It has been a pleasure for me to facilitate the focus sessions. I also appreciated the presence and assistance of the city administrator during the focus sessions. I look forward to assisting city officials during the upcoming strategic planning session. Please contact me if you have any questions or need clarification about the focus session results.