Greater Louisville Project

The Greater Louisville Project

Lessons from America"s Best-Run Cities

Legislative leadership:
Vision and values

June 18, 2002

White Paper

The second in a series of dialogues
produced in cooperation with
The National Academy of Public Administration

The Greater Louisville Project is an initiative organized by the Community Foundation of Louisville with the goal of ensuring that merger makes a positive difference for our community. During this time of transition, we have the opportunity to explore the best ways in which the new government can be effective, efficient and enhance the quality of life and future of our community. Through forums such as this, the project will bring best practice thinking to the creation of the new merged city-county government. The Greater Louisville Project is made possible through the generosity of the James Graham Brown Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The C. E. & S. Foundation, The Community Foundation of Louisville, the Gheens Foundation, and The Humana Foundation.

These white paper was developed by staff of The Greater Louisville Project. In addition, the session transcript and the full powerpoint presentation from the workshop are available on The Greater Louisville Project web site, www.greaterlouisvilleproject.org.

The Greater Louisville Project

The Greater Louisville Project is an initiative designed to bring best-practice thinking to the creation of the new consolidated city-county government. Organized by the Community Foundation of Louisville, the project is financed with the generous support of the James Graham Brown Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The C. E. & S. Foundation, The Community Foundation of Louisville, the Gheens Foundation, and The Humana Foundation.

Project mission: To be a rich resource for the new leaders of the metro government of Greater Louisville and to help ensure that merger makes the greatest possible positive difference for the community.

A community agenda: The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy has been charged with providing a comprehensive, independent look at how Metro Louisville stacks up in key indicators and policy areas as it becomes the 16th largest city in the United States.

"Best practice" panels: A series of dialogues -- Lessons from America's Best-Run Cities -- will focus on the most effective practices in key areas: government organization, legislative leadership, workforce development, neighborhood enrichment. Organized with the National Academy for Public Administration, these workshops will bring experts from across the U.S. to share ideas with groups of local business, government, community and civic leaders and discuss their applications to Metro Louisville.

Spreading the word: The panel sessions will be summarized in a series of white papers. Videotapes and transcripts will also be available. The Greater Louisville Project Web site (www.greaterlouisvilleproject.org) and displays at Louisville Free Public Library branches will make it easy for interested citizens to learn more.

> *Local legislators have a tough job. They are directly and most intimately accountable to the people in their neighborhoods who elect them . . . yet by themselves, acting as individuals, local legislators have very little direct control over the means to solve anybody"s particular problem . . . Nor can they as individuals pursue a grand vision to make Louisville a better community.*
>
> *It is that dilemma -- the pressure for immediate, local, neighborhood-level constituent concerns balanced with the big-picture community needs -- that we want to talk about.*
>
> *Opening remarks*
> *Carolyn Gatz, Director*
> *The Greater Louisville Project*

> *If we are to make merger make a difference, if we are to take advantage of this new, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create a government that works, we cannot have politics as usual. Today we hope to explore a better way.*
>
> *Opening remarks,*
> *Dennis Riggs, Hhairman,*
> *The Greater Louisville Project*

Introduction

The juggling act faced by any new local legislator is challenging:

❑ Fresh from the election fray, how do you shift gears from politics to policy?

❑ After the intense individual quest for votes, how do you commit to the collaboration needed to get things done?

❑ How do you work effectively with colleagues you may know only from their campaign advertising?

❑ Chosen by residents in your district, how do you balance responsiveness to their neighborhood concerns with the need for big-picture decision-making that tackles major community problems?

For the 26 members of the new Greater Louisville Metro Council who will take office in January 2003, the stakes are even greater: They will help create and lead the brand-new consolidated city-county government approved by Jefferson County voters. And they will inherit the ambitious aspirations that referendum reflected -- to embrace a new agenda for the community and ultimately to make a difference in the quality of life for its citizens.

Working together to create a written document that sets forth a common vision and set of values is the most important step in meeting those challenges: That was the clear message from national experts when they met with an invited group of all Metro Council candidates as well as local government and civic leaders at a workshop in June 2002.

This paper describes strategies outlined at that meeting which have emerged as effective practices in other communities, with emphasis given to the Local Government Leadership Model developed at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. It also seeks to capture the spirit of that workshop – government's real-world quest to live the promise of democratic ideals.

> *Democracy is a trust and the officers of government are trustees and both the trust and trustees are created for the benefit of the people.*
> *Henry Clay 1829*

> *Democracy is not a tearing down. It is a building up . . . It does not destroy, it fulfills. It is the alpha and omega of man"s relation to man . . . Its foundation lays hold upon eternity.*
> *Calvin Coolidge 1916*

> *The experience of democracy is like the experience of life itself -- always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes turbulent and all the more valuable for having been tested by adversity.*
> *Jimmy Carter 1978*

The Panel Frames the Challenge

The workshop leaders were:

Robert Matson, director of leadership development at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service and director of the center's Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia. A former president of Ricker College and vice president of Kent State University, Matson has an Ed.D. degree from Indiana University. He helped develop the high performance government model, which emphasizes the need for strong leadership teamwork throughout organizations -- not just at the top -- to achieve goals. Working for more than 15 years with government boards and councils, Matson said he seldom encounters communities facing a transformation as dramatic as Louisville's.

> *You've leapt off the cliff and are saying, "We're going to develop this on the way down." You must be lying awake thinking how to take advantage of this opportunity.*

A. Tyler St. Clair, a faculty member at the Weldon Cooper Center. A graduate of James Madison University, she worked for eight years in Lynchburg, Va., city government as an internal organizational development consultant. At the Cooper Center, her chief focus is on implementing a governance model to help councils and boards provide collective visionary leadership.

> *Democracy is a very powerful thing . . .We want to tap into the core values that caused you to step up and run, to say, "This could be a better place."*

Robert J. O'Neill, president of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) and organizer of the session. A former executive of Fairfax County, Va., and city manager in Hampton, Va., he has a record of innovation in performance-based management. An independent, nonpartisan organization chartered by Congress, NAPA aims to assist federal, state and local governments improve effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Even in the context of such recent projects as work on the structuring of the FBI and the new federal Office for Homeland Security, NAPA views Louisville's transition with intense interest, he said, because it is the first city of its size to vote to consolidate local government in a generation.

> *This is a significant, perhaps a seminal, event for local governments in the United States right now.   If you are successful, you will become a model for communities all over the country to come visit and see in the 21st century how you operate for the greater good.*

Legislative Leadership: One Major Balancing Act

> *Everything about the nature of running and getting elected to a local legislative body will push you to concentrate your time, your attention and your energy on serving your immediate constituent needs at the grassroots level -- and that's as it should be.*
>
> *That's why local legislative bodies are elected by district. And yet you're all running because you, like us, want to make merger make a difference.*
>
> *But most major problems and challenges cannot be solved on a district level alone. These are complex problems, challenges requiring big-picture thinking and long-term strategies and investment. That's the part that can easily get lost.*
>
> <div align="right">Carolyn Gatz</div>

It is easy to imagine the differences that could divide the 26 new members of Louisville's Metro Council: Politics, race, gender, age, education, work experience. There will likely be government veterans and first-timers. City dwellers, suburbanites. fiscal conservatives, champions for society's have-nots, managed-growth proponents, laissez-faire advocates. The list could go on and on.

It is harder to see how they will come together, as they must, to face the urgent agenda that will greet them in January 2003, just weeks after the November election.

That is challenge that collaborative leadership models seek to meet: To appreciate the diversity at the heart of the democratic ideal and to then build upon underlying common values -- a deep concern for the quality of life in the community. To recognize responsibilities such locally elected officials have to district voters -- but to create a structure to help them address larger, complex issues.

The University of Virginia model and the Carver Guide to Basic Principles of Policy Governance (see Appendix 1) offer two such templates for moving beyond politics to focus on policy.

Both recognize challenges inherent in the job and offer strategies to help decision-makers focus on issues of most compelling importance, develop written statements of their goals and values; and create a framework for working together effectively.

> *There is a very distinct difference in the skills and the roles between getting elected and governing . . . How do you represent the constituency in your districts which there will be an enormous pressure to do . . . But at the same time how do you make the sum of the parts greater than the individual parts themselves?. . .When do you collaborate? When do you fight? What are the rules of engagement?*
>
> *All of these are things you are going to have to master on the fly. This is the equivalent of changing the tires on the truck while moving 60 miles an hour.*
>
> <div align="right">Robert J. O"Neill</div>

Switching from politics to policy is just one of the challenges that makes local government decision-making different from other leadership jobs. Among others:

❑ Citizens, in an era of flashy marketing and consumerism, may view elections as a business transaction.

> *They want a quick return on their investment. How do you show you have a plan and may need to slow things down a bit?*
>
> Robert Matson

❑ Decision-making occurs in a fast-paced environment and in public view. Complex factors -- including deeply felt political values -- shape debate.

> *It's a world of no right answers. There's a lot of conflict and compromise.*
>
> *A. Tyler St. Clair*

❑ And it can be hard to get meaningful feedback on your accomplishments and effectiveness.

> *How do you know if you are doing a good job? You may have to wait until the next election.*
>
> *Robert Matson*

Special Challenges for Metro Council Members

Members of Louisville"s council will face a unique universe of additional challenges as new members of a new body in a new government. Among those listed by the candidates and other workshop participants:

❑ Reassuring citizens and employees, as one participant put it, that services will be provided from Day 1 and continue . . . We need to hit the ground running.

❑ Helping government organize itself, as one board member described it: a very untypical and hugely demanding and time-consuming task.

❑ Considering in a methodical-and-prioritized way the hundreds of ordinances previously enacted by Louisville and Jefferson County governments.

❑ Managing the pace and intensity of their over-all workload -- a participant suggested a schedule of debate -- so you"re not dealing with 15 controversial issues at once.

❑ Facing unusually high public expectations. We"re going to have a number of constituents in every district who"re going to say, "You said you would do this. Do it by Friday."

❑ Coping with uncertain budget conditions -- a financial situation dire at best, hopeless at worst, as a candidate described it.

❑ Confronting issues in providing services to areas with different histories and expectations: the city of Louisville, dozens of small cities and large previously unincorporated areas.

❑ Facing uncharted internal council alliances -- from the political to the geographic -- and defining the council's relationship with the new Mayor.

One Model: Vision and Values help operate at a higher level

In the legend of King Arthur of Camelot, Arthur was successful in removing the sword from the stone where all others had failed because he knew the heart of the people and was committed to a vision which met their needs. . .That fable contains powerful parallels for local elected leadership today. . . Today's world requires a collectively committed elected body to bring forth the magic of democracy.

Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service
University of Virginia

In the day-to-day crush of demands, it would be natural for a time-pressed local elected official to succumb to the lure of the in-basket school of time management -- simply coping with the inevitable, endless flow of problems.

But that would be a fatal mistake, said Robert Matson:

If you wind up at the end of the year and have solved all the problems that come across your desk, what have you really done? Not much in terms of leadership.

The center's Local Elected Leadership Model sets out a strategy aimed at creating a vision for the community and guidelines for collaborative decision-making. Its goal: to help focus on policy and the substantive, complex issues that challenge communities in these rapidly changing times.

 Its payoffs include increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of council operations: Time invested early in establishing a clear vision for the community and structure for council-member roles provides a context for setting priorities and basis for evaluating issues.

The process, usually initiated through a series of retreats and guided by experienced staff over several months, has five steps.

1. Forming strong working relationships. Council members who know each other's strengths, philosophies and personal histories have a greater potential for overcoming differences in politics and personal style to collaborate on solving problems. They are also more able to find common ground if they can understand the political values that shape each others" perspectives as issues are debated.

Four key political values defined by University of Kansas professor John Nalbandian, outlined in the Cooper Center model: efficiency or cost-consciousness; concern about individual rights; belief in the importance of social equity, that is, treating all citizens equally; and a commitment to representation, to being sure all groups are well-heard. (See Appendix 2 for more detail.)

Understanding perspectives can help council members work together. The whole idea is that people may come at an issue from different places.

A. Tyler St. Clair

2. Building a collective picture of the community's future. The council, often working with the mayor, crafts the critical elements of a 10- to 20-year vision -- a document that serves both as its goals and a source of inspiration for government and for the community. Such a vision is both concrete and grounded in values: A strong sense of direction anchored in higher moral purpose, as Matson put it.

> *Let's brainstorm what's right in Louisville and Jefferson County. What's part of the present that must be preserved ? How do we preserve the heart of who we are as a community? And then also, what needs to be changed?*

One reason this well-articulated vision is so critical is that, he said, Democracy is designed to fly apart. With elections, players can change. Having the community's most sacred view of its goals in writing provides a road map -- subject, of course, to revision.

> *Vision is a kind of constancy of purpose, how we check the rightness of our decisions.*
>
> *Robert Matson*

3. Developing principles to drive each project toward the vision. These are values to guide decision-making by both the council and the staff. Louisville might state as a principle that it's critical for its economic well-being to work on developing economic vitality in adjoining counties in southern Indiana and Kentucky. It might make it a principle to consider the intent of old city and county measures as it evaluates procedures. It could put down in black and white its commitment to seeking partnerships with business and other public entities to achieve its goals.

> *A good vision by itself is just a dream...so the question is: "How do you, as an elected body, lay out how you want all policies to drive out toward that vision?"*
>
> *Robert Matson*

4. Choosing effective operating guidelines. These are the values that shape how council members work with each other and government staff -- their roles, expectations, procedures. "How are we going to make decisions?" is how A. Tyler St. Clair describes it.

Understanding the importance of daily decisions made by government department heads, the council might underscore in its guidelines its commitment to working cooperatively with the mayor, who appoints those administrators.

Louisville might choose to have as a guideline that staff will always bring alternative recommendations to the council, not just one option.

One operating guideline example from Lynchburg, Va.: The council will formulate policy by determining the broadest policies before progressing to more narrow ones.

> *You are stepping up to a clean slate. Your work culture will evolve and will be there for those who come after you. You want to be crafting a work culture that will be worth inheriting.*
>
> *Robert Matson*

5. Engaging others. It's valuable to involve the community in shaping and enacting the shared vision. It enriches the process to harness the talents, diversity of opinions, values and energy in

the citizenry and it also helps the dream move forward. Poor voter turnout and apparent citizen apathy are not grounds for discouragement about involvement in what Matson calls proactive, pre-problem creation of a vision.

> *If you get them involved in the framing of your vision, you have some real feeling of togetherness around what we want this community to be. . . .You have an opportunity for bringing people on board, for moving into a new phase of democracy.*
>
> *Robert Matson*

Next Steps/Final Thoughts

> *This all sounds in a perfect world where you should start. But we are going to have six weeks between the election and when we take office.*
>
> *A Metro Council candidate*

The Local Elected Leadership model outlines a process: It generally waits a few months after an election to help legislators gear up for the challenges of governing. It uses one-on-one interviews and personality/learning style testing to prepare them for a retreat, which launches the process. Building working relationships generally precedes substantive visioning. And the focus is not on immediate issues -- but on the longer-term. Over four to six months, written documents begin to reflect their collective thinking.

It is just one roadmap to consider.

Already in the works for Louisville's Metro Council members is an orientation program or retreat after the election, perhaps with private funding and the help of a coalition of local leadership groups, said Greater Louisville Project Director Carolyn Gatz.

The question of a larger, formal, guided process of organizational development may await the council's decision during its first months in office, she said.

The day's workshop may have seemed a bit like drinking from a fire hose, she said -- a somewhat-overwhelming experience in the midst of an election campaign. At the same time, it underscores the challenge that lies ahead. And it offers a provocative framework for thinking about the highest calling of the legislator's role.

> *The point is that there's a reason and a payoff for the new council to engage in developing itself so that it can function at a higher level -- the greater coherence and commitment that you can see would emerge from a process like this that would lead to the common collective vision this community really needs.*
>
> *Carolyn Gatz*

> *You are going to establish the legacy of what this council is going to leave behind: We are going to leave you to wrestle with that.*
>
> *Robert Matson*

> *Democratic institutions are never done. They are, like living tissue, always a-making.*
>
> *Woodrow Wilson 1889*

APPENDIX 1

Leadership lessons From THE CARVER MODEL

For boards and commissions, the policy governance model developed by John Carver and Miriam Mayhem Carver is often viewed as a breakthrough -- bringing thoughtful leadership to a new level. Its spirit is embodied in many facets of the Local Elected Leadership Model presented at the best-practices workshop by faculty from the University of Virginia.

The language elaborating on some of its core principles is resonant and potentially inspiring for governmental legislative bodies such as the Metro Council. Three examples:

❑ Board decisions should be predominately policy decisions. And boards should formulate policy by determining the broadest values before progressing to more narrow ones.

> *Board policies should be the expression of the board's soul. . . From the stage of musing to the stage of black-on-white documents, in the practice of policy governance, these policies are the product of the board itself . . . If the board's wisdom is not reflected in these policies, a central feature of real board leadership has been missed.*

❑ A board should define and delegate rather than react and ratify.

> *Boards are accustomed to approving plans brought to them by staff. But there are predictable problems caused by this traditional practice. The very act of approving forces boards to become entangled in trivia...The obstruction this constitutes for staff creativity and agility is a severe disadvantage to the organization.*

❑ Ends determination is the pivotal duty of governance.

> *The justification for any organization lies in what difference it can make . . . Focusing on ends ensures that the board tackles the difficult questions . . . of what good is to be done for whom and at what cost.*

*From the **Carver Guide: Basic Principles of Policy Governance**, John Carver and Miriam Mayhew Carver, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA.*

Political Values

In the political arena, decision-making revolves not just around technical recommendations or financial bottom lines but around political values. Many community issues tap into a mix of such values -- and understanding them can help council members work together and with their constituents.

Representation: This is the deep-seated belief that government responds to the will of the people through elected representatives. The wishes of citizens should be represented in governing bodies. If a public policy is going to have impact on a group of citizens, that group should have the opportunity to be heard.

Efficiency: Citizens expect government to be run with concern for resource management. This is achieved through cost-consciousness and rational, analytical, decision-making and through an emphasis on expertise and professionalism.

Individual rights: Citizens are granted legal rights that protect them from arbitrary decision-making by government. These rights may be expressed in the Constitution and in state and local laws and regulations.

Social equity: Frequently citizens are treated as members of groups rather than as individuals. As group members, they expect treatment equal to members of other groups. For example, people living in one neighborhood expect to receive a level of government service similar to that received in other neighborhoods.

John Nalbandian
University of Kansas