

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Haines Borough Assembly + Mayor - December 2016 Strategic Planning Retreat

On December 11, 2016 the Haines Borough assembly and mayor met from 1:00 to 4:30 pm at the Library for a strategic planning retreat. They each completed a survey the week prior with questions on their priorities, concerns, approach to budget shortfalls, and more. Survey results were aggregated and used to set the retreat agenda, and were reported at the retreat to help kick-start conversations. Survey results can be seen in Appendix 1 of the Full report. Sheinberg Associates facilitated the retreat.

### What Criteria do we use to make Decisions?

Assembly members and the mayor were asked what criteria they use when setting priorities or taking positions. The 34 answers easily fell into six categories; there was some surprise to see the similarities in everyone's thinking.

The categories of responses are:

- What are opinions of staff and my assembly colleagues?
- What are the financial ramifications?
- What does the public think?
- Will it improve the public good, quality of life, and be fair/equitable?
- Is it sustainable?
- Does it reflect my common sense and vision as a leader?

### 2017 Assembly Top Priorities to Work on and try to Accomplish in the Next Year

- Budget Matters (general approach, FY 18 and beyond, role/actions to respond to proposed state/federal cuts)
- Improved Communications (with each other, and with the public)
- Lutak Dock Improvements
- Boat Harbor Improvements
- Policing, Alcohol and Drug Abuse (ways to reduce alcohol and drug abuse)
- Maintenance Planning (for borough facilities and infrastructure)
- Recreation Planning (adult, comprehensive)

### Approach to Addressing FY 18 Projected Budget Deficit

To begin work on the FY 18 budget, with its projected areawide and townsite fund deficits, a good starting approach to balance the budget would be to use the aggregated survey results:

- 43-44% from fund balances (savings)
- 25-36% from budget reductions
- 30-33% from new revenues

### Budget Details

Diving into budget details, the survey asked assembly members and the mayor whether each department budget or type of spending should generally be reduced, maintained, or increased. For each of 22 items, the approximate amount of the borough budget for that item was listed. Remember when reviewing results of budget "votes" herein

that these scores are simply a good starting place for preparing the FY 18 budget and considering longer-term approaches given current and likely future deficits. Assembly members and the mayor noted that they will need a deeper understanding of the implications and pros and cons of budget options as well as hearing from the public as part of their budget work and before final decisions are made.

Most votes were to maintain each type of spending. When all votes for all 22 items were tallied 99 votes were to maintain budget line items, 17 votes were to reduce, and 33 to increase.

The nine budget items with highest support send a message to sustain activities and facilities used by families, youth, and seniors, and to give priority to fire protection and maintenance.

- The four budget line items with weighted average scores on the 'increase' side (below 2.00) were support for: (1) the School District, (2) Swimming pool hours, (3) Building maintenance, and (4) Community Youth Development
- Two more budget line items had all votes to maintain: (5) Library hours, AND (6) Fire department response
- Three line items had all votes to maintain except one to reduce, these were: (7) Animal control, (8) Townsite road maintenance, and (9) Senior facility maintenance

The only line item with more votes to reduce than maintain was Travel for Staff and Elected Officials, with 4 votes to reduce, 2 to maintain, and 1 to increase. A budget reduction was also supported for ambulance service as long as there is an entity to charge for service rather than offering this for free (this item had the highest weighted average score towards a reduction).

There was a complete split on only one line item, Support to Non-Profits, with 3 votes to increase, 3 votes to reduce, and 1 vote to maintain.

Opinion on appropriate revenue enhancements were generally "all over the map." However, there was some alignment on support to:

- Develop and sell select parcels of borough land (4 support, 1 oppose)
- Add 3-5% more tax on the sales of alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco (4 support, 0 oppose), and
- Eliminate exemptions for personal property tax (4 support, 1 oppose).

Most opposition was to raising sales taxes from 5.5 to 6% year round (5 oppose, 2 support).

In addition to revenue enhancement or reductions that were on the list to "vote " for or against, many assembly members were interested in researching severance (excise) taxes on minerals, timber, and fish.

Key discussion points during budget conversations are detailed in the full report, and include: (1) a few potential 'disconnects' between the assembly's budget scores and other interests; (2) concern that that some assembly members are not availing themselves of in-house orientation and training; (3) the idea of combining some of the borough's dedicated sales taxes; (4) that the assembly and public need a better understanding of the city's roles in economic development and the breath of economic/tourism activities and spending; (6) communication with State Legislature, Congress and lobbyists on Haines priorities; and (7) that staff would appreciate some assembly attendance at some of their public and community meetings.

### **For the Good of the Order**

Ways to deal with decision-making given frequent assembly turnover, and, better communication with both the public and among themselves, were the three matters identified for group discussion during the retreat.

Assembly Changeover. Regular election cycles have brought significant assembly turnover recently. Boat harbor improvements were cited as an example of an assembly decision started long ago for which there are now differing and varied assembly opinions. Assembly members wonder whether there are ways to 'lock-in' assembly decisions, or, are there standard ways to revisit assembly decisions after an election cycle?

It was noted however, that generally one assembly cannot 'bind the hands' of a future assembly. During discussion, the following techniques to avoid turnover challenges were identified:

1. Bring the Public Along. Ensure there is public understanding and support for assembly decisions.
2. Explain and Document the Rationale for Assembly Decisions. This way new assemblies' can go back and understand the thinking and rationale of the prior assembly's decisions. This should be documented in regular and Committee-of-the-Whole (COW) meeting minutes and in whereas clauses for a resolution or ordinance. Also document options considered but rejected by the assembly and the reasons. Citizens or future assembly members may not agree with a decision, but if they see what was considered and understand why a decision was made and why options were rejected, even if they disagree with a review of the rationale and due process that occurred will help them understand and accept the decision.
3. Get Things Done in a Timely Manner. If decisions are implemented expeditiously rather than dragging on for years, there is less time and need for second guessing.

Communication with Each Other. There was a unanimous desire to find ways to allow more conversational discussion among assembly members during meetings. Even at COW meetings, whose purpose is to allow for less formal conversation among the body, dialogue is too often a series of statements, rather than a conversation. Assembly members desire time to lay out their concerns and ideas, then listen to and build upon each other's ideas. While assembly members recognize they have differing opinions, they long to have more 'neighborly conversation' with one another and time to consider and debate ideas as a body. This would also enhance the public's understanding and trust of assembly decisions and decision-making. The challenge is to be conversational but also maintain order and due process during the meeting,

Seven ideas were discussed to allow more conversational discussions; see the full report for details on how to do each of these items:

1. Active Listening
2. Stop and Summarize
3. Begin Discussions with Assembly 'List'
4. Small Suspensions of Roberts Rules of Order
5. Assembly and Staff Work Together
6. Make Effective use of the Committee Process (and Trust)
7. Build Working Relationships

Communication (and Trust) with the Public. Responses to several survey questions indicate assembly members and the mayor have great concern over making government more open and transparent and fostering public trust, support, and participation in government. Implementing the suggestions in 'Assembly Changeover' and 'Communicating with Each Other' will help build public trust and better communication. Other ideas were better use of the committee process, public hearings, and having assembly office hours.