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LEE'S SUMMIT 360°: CHARTING TOMORROW
Citizen-Led Long Range Strategic Planning Process

City of Lee's Summit, Missouri

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Lee's Summit 360: Charting Tomorrow Strategic Planning Process

Over the last thirty years, the City of Lee's Summit has undergone a transformation from a small town, just emerging from its rural roots, into one of the largest cities in the Kansas City metropolitan area. This growth occurred at a rapid pace, with the population almost doubling since 1990, and the City reaching 90 percent build out by 2008. This period of rapid growth has been and continues to be effectively managed through the strong leadership provided by the Mayor, City Council and City Manager. Their leadership is in turn guided by the vision and goals established by citizen-based strategic planning processes. As a result of the original strategic plan, *Lee's Summit: 21st Century* adopted in 1993 and later updated in 1998, the City experienced significant successes such as Legacy Park, a new Police Headquarters and a revitalized downtown area anchored by a new City Hall. In 2008, with many of the goals of the original strategic planning process completed and the City transitioning from a high-growth community to a maintenance community with new challenges and opportunities, the Mayor requested another strategic planning process be established to serve as a guide for the future growth and sustainability of Lee's Summit.

Due to the complicated environment that was developing at this time, citizen confidence in government throughout the nation had been strongly shaken; any City-led strategic planning process would be exceedingly challenging. The City again recognized the importance of creating a citizen-driven, non-political long-range plan that would ultimately be supported by the entire community, City staff and City Council upon adoption. To achieve this goal, the City of Lee's Summit contracted with the National Civic League (NCL) to guide and facilitate this unique and innovative approach to long term strategic planning. Unlike many other strategic planning



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processes utilized around the country, the National Civic League (NCL) offered a strategic planning framework which would be citizen-driven and apolitical.

Through this citizen-led approach, the participants were encouraged to create a vision for the future without the typical political or economic pressures that frequently guide such a process. As part of NCL's guidelines, City staff remained unbiased supporters rather than guiding forces behind the planning process. The NCL strategic planning program was divided into three separate phases or processes: initiation, planning, and implementation. The initiation phase established the tone and the foundation for the credibility of the planning process. In order for the final plan to have the upmost credibility, the participating stakeholders on the strategic planning committee needed to be a widely diverse group of individuals which would cross racial and economic barriers, and these individuals must develop effective working relationships based on trust, understanding and respect.

Over 200 citizens volunteered to participate on the *Lee's Summit 360° (LS360°)* strategic planning committee, and they gathered together on September 16, 2008 to kick off one of the largest strategic planning processes NCL has ever undertaken. Under the guidance of Derek Okubo of NCL, for eight months this diverse group of individuals met every three weeks to produce a strategic plan that would outline the needs and expectations for the Lee's Summit community over the next 10-15 years. Through hours of open debate, discussion, and collaboration among stakeholders, six Key Performance Areas (KPA) were identified as the main areas of emphasis for the strategic plan: Economic Development, Education, Health and Human Services, Local Government, Quality of Life, and Transportation. These KPA's worked together to



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create a unified vision that would serve the common good of Lee's Summit by establishing a guide for future growth and sustainability for the Mayor and City Council.

Utilizing technology, such as interactive public forums and websites, these targeted areas were evaluated, researched, and analyzed by the committees and shared with the entire community as the process progressed. Not only did this allow constant communication with the public for feedback on very complex and controversial topics, but it also brought additional expertise in areas that committee members found especially challenging. For instance, discussions on Health and Human Services centered on establishing a public health clinic in the City that would be supported by the county. As the Director of the Jackson County Health Department was a Lee's Summit citizen, she was able to join into the discussion via the free public forum and provide information to the committee on the current locations of free health clinics already in place in the City. This allowed the committee to quickly refocus its efforts on other unmet needs in the community, thus saving critical time and resources.

After eight months of research, discussion, citizen feedback, the *LS360^o* planning committee reached a consensus on a recommended plan. It was presented to the Mayor and City Council on May 7, 2009, and throughout the summer the City Council and the Co-Chairs of each KPA worked together to create a final report that would serve as the long term strategic plan of the City. On August 6, 2009, the City Council unanimously approved a resolution adopting the *Lee's Summit 360^o: Charting Tomorrow* as the long-term strategic plan for the City of Lee's Summit, thus completing the planning process. Following the adoption of the resolution and plan, the Mayor and City Council established a 15 member implementation committee that holds the important task of bringing the plan to life over the next 10-15 years.



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The strategic planning process was a complex effort, effectively managed by the *LS360*^o Co-Chairs, with assistance from City staff and NCL. As with all large committees and consultant-based projects, there were considerable expenses to complete such an endeavor. Costs for the consulting fees and supplies for the meetings totaled \$50,000. The City of Lee's Summit paid 74% or \$37,002, and the remainder was paid through private partnerships with Truman Heartland Foundation and several other generous benefactors. Although a significant expenditure during a challenging budget year, the cost of the process far exceeded the benefits to the City, both in the near term and the future, in terms of building community support for future projects and clearly establishing priorities for scarce public resources.

The final plan contains numerous projects to be completed over the next 10 – 15 years. This highly detailed plan provides the City direction and input for projects and programs, establishes priorities, and includes a timeline to help manage expectations and monitor progress. Through the leadership of the City Manager and his understanding of the importance of and support for this process, a position was created within the City Manager's Office primarily dedicated to support of the *LS360*^o efforts. Since August 2009, City staff has been begun work on many action items included in the plan, and community participation remains strong. A communitywide Education Summit is scheduled for June 12, 2010; a 'Livable Streets' committee is meeting to draft an ordinance for City Council consideration in May; a 'Human Services Advisory Board' committee is meeting to submit a resolution and formal advisory board recommendation to the Council over the next several months as well. All these activities and many more which are underway are citizen-driven, and a tracking dashboard is available to the community online to monitor progress and stay involved in the effort.



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Although the strategic planning process was successful, there were lessons learned for future planning processes. Although it was a critical decision to ask that the City Council remain uninvolved so the process remained apolitical, it made the final presentation of the plan difficult. As the City Council was uninvolved in the committee meetings, they were not engaged enough to clearly understand the many details included in the final report. This slowed the approval process of the plan and weakened community support as it neared adoption. For example, at the May 7, 2009 presentation of the final report to the City Council, over 100 members of the *LS360*^o committee were in attendance. By approval in August, only 15 members remained to answer Council questions. If communication has been kept open between all parties throughout the process, approval most likely would have been more expedient and momentum would not have been lost.

The most important lesson learned from this process was that creating a citizen-directed plan can provide critical feedback for the City Council and City staff, and it can also foster a culture of trust and community support for the local government. One of the remarkable changes which occurred during the process was the dramatic increase in the level of trust in the City by the community. Members of the community who publicly spoke out against the City prior to this process became partners and advocates for City by the end of the planning process. Due to strong leadership, cooperation and innovation from citizens, stakeholders, elected officials and staff, the City of Lee's Summit has a vision for the future. Best of all, it is a plan by, of and for the entire community and fully supported by those trusted to enact it: the elected officials and the City staff under the direction of the City Manager. The group of over 200 individuals that partnered with their city has made a difference for many future generations of Lee's Summit residents.

