



Maquoketa City Council
201 E Pleasant St, Maquoketa, IA 52060



Date: May 5th, 2022

To: Maquoketa City Council, Maquoketa City Manager

From: MPA Team: Caleb Smith, Cami Rasmussen, and Lily Sronkoski

Cc: Travis Kraus, Associate Professor of Practice Phuong H. Nguyen, Associate Professor

Re: Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities Partnership

SUMMARY

Locally elected officials in small communities like Maquoketa can face a steep learning curve when assimilating to their new roles on municipal councils. This learning curve can inhibited ability to create and carry out actionable goals that have been identified in Maquoketa's 2040 comprehensive plan and general council goals. In addition, newly elected officials in Maquoketa typically receive little orientation before they must vote on council business. A formal onboarding process for newly elected council members helps address the limited knowledge of council operations and practices as newly elected officials take office.

The purpose of this project is to assist the City of Maquoketa in developing an actionable achievement plan with the goal of improving Community Character as identified in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. This plan will be used to guide the city's budgets, activities, and initiatives. Through surveys, interviews, and questionnaires, the MPA Team identified Community Character as a priority and then facilitated a pilot strategic planning and goal setting workshop for this priority. The workshop format provides the framework to plan for the achievement of goals identified in the Comprehensive Plan and other council goals.

The project also includes development of an onboarding process for newly elected city council members. The MPA Team provided a set of documents that outline key information on the city and resources to best acclimate and prepare newly elected members for council duties. The set includes city council best practices on meeting format and expectations, code of conduct and general dynamics of local government operations. The materials should be considered living documents that can be updated to reflect the city's future changes.

The MPA Team makes recommendations focusing on an intentional approach for identifying strategic goals and practices that lead to actionable steps and outcomes. The MPA Team's final goal setting recommendations include the development of a goal achievement/ strategic planning process, the expert facilitation of consistent goal setting workshops and the continuation of the priorities identified during the MPA Team's pilot workshop and in the Comprehensive Plan. Regarding onboarding, the MPA Team recommends formalizing an onboarding process with an onboarding packet, conducting an overview of city policies, and participating in external city council training opportunities. Lastly the MPA Team recommends general policies including the establishment and implementation of a council code of ethics, a system for the division of labor and best practices to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in the community.

BACKGROUND

In conjunction with the Maquoketa City Council, the MPA team collaborated with the Jackson County Economic Alliance and the Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, in city council goal setting best practices and the development of onboarding practices and materials for Maquoketa City Council members.

The city of Maquoketa is the county seat in Jackson County Iowa. Located in the eastern part of the state along Highways 61 and 64, Maquoketa is a regional leader in arts and entertainment, healthcare, historic preservation, and recreation. In 2019, Maquoketa adopted the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which established the community's vision for the next 20 years. Since the adoption, Maquoketa has a new mayor, two new city council members, and hired a new City Manager.

The MPA Team used case studies, best practices, and stakeholder inputs (surveys and interviews). The MPA Team also facilitated a pilot strategic planning and goal setting workshop with the council. The workshop focused on one CP goal, Community Character, which was identified as a priority through stakeholder inputs. The workshop served as an example to show the council how to use its process for future goal setting. We also conducted extensive reviews of the literature on onboarding for newly elected city officials.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis, the MPA Team makes the below recommendations on goal setting and onboarding. These recommendations are to enhance the productivity, operations, and decision making of the Maquoketa City Council and finally, to help the City achieve the vision established in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan.

The MPA Team makes **three goal setting recommendations**.

Goal Achievement/ Strategic Planning Process: The MPA Team recommends that the Maquoketa City Council continue a goal setting workshop in the future. Once this recommendation is adopted, there should be a process for how to move forward and tangible steps to achieve any goal. The MPA Team suggests four primary questions to consider for this recommendation:

1. Who will lead the charge and who all must be involved for its success?
2. Where are the funds coming from to support this or how will it be funded?
3. What is a realistic timeframe for completion?
4. How and when will the progress be tracked, checked, and evaluated?

Expert Facilitation of Goal Setting Workshops: The MPA Team recommends that the Maquoketa City Council hire outside experts to facilitate future workshops. This workshop should be held with a frequency set by the Council and City Manager (e.g., annually, or bi-annually).

Move Forward on Workshop Plans: The MPA Team recommends that the Maquoketa City Council and City Manager begin moving forward on the priorities recognized during the workshop.

The MPA Team makes **four onboarding recommendations**.

Formalize an Onboarding Process: The MPA Team recommends formalizing an onboarding process that involves, among other things, a plan for sharing important city information, mentorship, and team building practices and opportunities.

Form an Onboarding Packet: The MPA Team recommends that the Mayor and City Manager further institute an onboarding packet. The packet consists of a set of materials that outline key information, such as current projects, meeting structures, and key policies, that help acclimate new hires to their job duties. They can also provide a general overview of the community including its demographics, a summary of current projects, an explanation of issues facing the community, and other “need-to-know” information for them to make better-informed decisions. The materials should be updated to reflect future changes in the community.

Conduct an Overview of City Policies: The MPA Team recommends conducting an overview of city polices. These policies could include, capital improvement plan, comprehensive plan, city budget, city contracts & agreements, tax increment financing and audit/financial reports.

Participate in External City Council Training Opportunities: The MPA Team recommends the Maquoketa City Council continue to and enforce participation in offered external acclimation opportunities. In additional, ensure the financing of such opportunities is included in the council budget.

Establish and Implement a Council Code of Ethics: The MPA Team recommends the Maquoketa City Council adopt a Code of Ethics that reflects the character traits and values identified.

The MPA Team makes **three general recommendations.**

Division of Labor: The MPA Team recommends the Maquoketa Council and staff optimize use of departments, department heads, staff, committees, commissions, and other third-party groups to conduct city affairs, specific to the delegation of work from the outcomes of goal setting.

Team Building Opportunities: The MPA Team recommends that the Maquoketa City Council and staff participate in team building exercises, activities, programs, workshops, or retreats. The consistency of this shall be decided by the Mayor and City Manager and should be emphasized post elections or when new council members join the board

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice: The MPA Team recommends identifying goals of priority among residents, especially connecting with, and embracing underserved and minority populations.

CONCLUSION

Maquoketa’s city council and staff showed pride for their city and commitment to good governance throughout this process. The strategic goal setting workshop allowed the council to explore the city’s short-term priorities and long-term goals. The actions steps associated with each goal go beyond linear cause and effect. The goal setting and strategic planning process holistically examines each goal in the interrelated city landscape. Current and future council members need an equally thorough onboarding experience to successfully carry out the plans determined in a goal setting and strategic planning session. By heeding the above recommendations, the Maquoketa City Council could show commitment to the goal of building a stronger and better thriving community and city government.