

City of Hampton, VA

Governance Retreat Report

January 25, 2023

The City of Hampton held a Governance Retreat on January 25, 2023. The retreat was planned and facilitated by Raftelis.

Setting the Stage

Participants introduced themselves and then shared their expectations for the retreat. These expectations were captured by a graphic facilitator and included the following:

- Hampton is a model for surrounding City Councils. It is important to continue to serve the City with excellence.
- I want to continue doing work as a high-performing Council.
- I am looking forward to learning more about what Council would like to see in their interactions with each other and how I can best support them. I would also like to learn more about the two new Council members and how they will contribute to the Council's dynamic.
- Today is about building and enhancing a team that fairly considers appointees and provides feedback that helps them to execute their roles.
- I would like a clear understanding of what Council needs from staff.
- I would like to stop talking over each other when trying to get things done and make it easier for the Mayor to maintain order. We need better etiquette and need to go back to ELMO (enough, let's move on).
- We need better information sharing and less judgement on individual thought processes and ideology.
- Council members have varied backgrounds, which is a strength. They share a love for Hampton and a desire to serve the City.
- Successful teams result from an organizational culture that brings people together from various backgrounds with a shared desire to achieve success. The "secret sauce" to Hampton's City Council is its organizational culture. Hampton has a culture of innovation and respect of different opinions. I want to build upon the existing organizational culture and bring in the different perspectives of our new Council members in a way that doesn't change the way they work but enhances it.
- I want to get a good feeling of how things have been working for Council and to hear about opportunities for improvement.
- I would be happy to accomplish the objectives on the preliminary agenda. Work sessions are packed with agenda items, and I would like a way to better manage and improve the process.
- As a new Council member, I want to increase my knowledge on how I can bring my strengths to City Council. I expect to get better acquainted with Council members and get the lay of the land.
- Hampton has always been a leader in how it functions as a City. I want us to be a leader in best practices.



High Performing Governance in Council-Manager Cities

Dr. Nalbandian presented a workshop on Bridging the Gap between Political Acceptability and Administrative Sustainability. The slides from the workshop are included as an attachment to this report. The following notes reflect some key themes shared by Dr. Nalbandian.

Disruptive Forces

An essential prerequisite of effective governance is the ability to connect what is politically acceptable (what do we want to do?) with operational sustainability (can we do it?). Making that connection on various issues faced or anticipated has become complicated by “disruptive forces.” Disruptive forces widen the gap between political acceptability and operational capacity. There is a gap for every issue. Some gaps are easier to bridge than others, while other gaps require longer bridges (more time) or are wider (include more parties, such as community organizations.)

Disruptive forces include:

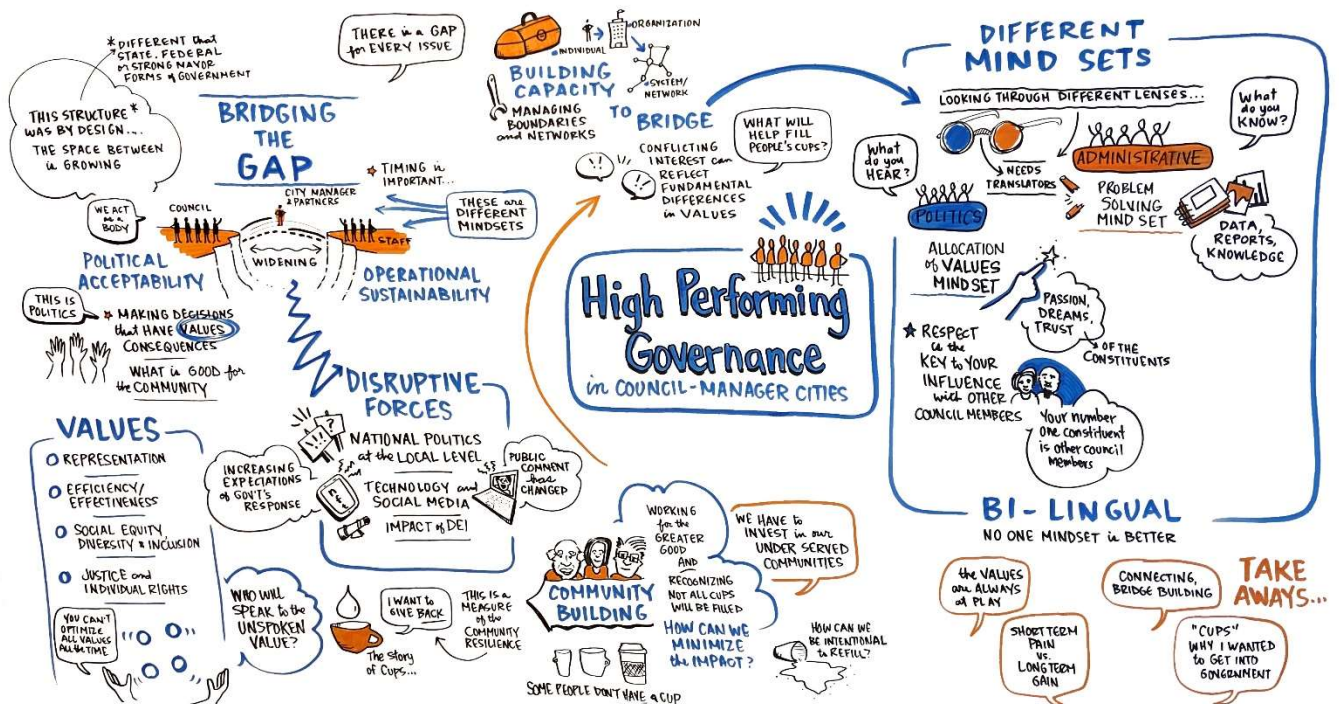
- National politics reflected at the local level
- Social media and technology
- Impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

Bridging the gap in this environment is enhanced by:

1. Understanding that politics involves choices among conflicting values where no value profile is correct. These four values include:
 - Representation/ Participation
 - Efficiency and Effectiveness/ Professionalism
 - Social Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
 - Justice and Individual Rights

All four values cannot be optimized at the same time, and a given value cannot be ignored for a long period. All values are important to building citizen investments in community and trust in elected officials, and community solidarity is at risk if values are ignored over time.

2. Politics and administration are more than differences in roles and responsibilities; they are mindsets.



The Cups Metaphor

Dr. Nalbandian used the metaphor of the cups. Essentially, everybody walks around with a cup that contains the quality of their life. When someone's cup becomes full and starts to overflow, that person tends to give back and become what is called a "model citizen." A community includes model citizens who realize that the quality of their life goes beyond what they can do for themselves. These model citizens believe that they have received something, such as a good education, quality parks, public safety, and clean water, and are repaying a debt.

Public servants share responsibility for filling these cups. The number of people who want to give something back is a measure of a community's fabric. If someone's cup is not full, they cannot engage in community aspirations. Cups matter when it comes to community building and creating bridges. When negotiating and compromising, public servants need to be careful about spilling cups, or discouraging those who want to give back. If a community lacks a genuine commitment to social justice, some people may not have a cup to fill.

Workshop Debrief

Participants discussed what they learned from Dr. Nalbandian's workshop and identified concepts that are especially relevant in Hampton.

- Staff are trustees and the Council represents forward momentum.
- Values that different people have will impact how they react to different issues.
- Short-term pain is sometimes appropriate in pursuit of long-term gain. A current decision might not be popular, but in the long-term, the gain might be worth the backlash and criticism. Participants used the Coliseum as an example of an idea that received initial pushback, but now fills cups within the community.
- When making tough decisions, we need to be intentional about how we plan to fill the cups. The City must follow through with commitments and investments in various groups and communities, even if they may temporarily tilt cups.
- Sometimes you can turn someone around to be a part of the team by inviting them to the table, which helps build bridges.
- There are communities in every locality that think or feel like they are competing against other for resources. Some individuals and communities view their cups as empty or believe that don't have a cup in the first place.
- The danger in emptying someone's cup is that they might disengage, or they may overly engage and become disruptive.
- In Hampton, property rezoning is a social equity issue that impacts cups.
- You cannot always fill everyone's cup. However, you can try to minimize emptying cups.
- Gun violence is forcing Hampton to fill cups to prevent issues down the road and to encourage certain members to be a part of the community.
- We must remain open to negotiation to support community building.

Good Governance

City Council, the Mayor, and Staff were asked to explore a series of questions about effective governance.

- How do effective governing bodies approach their role?
- How can/does the Mayor contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?
- How can/does the Staff contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?
- How can/do individual members of the City Council contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?
- What do you hope this governing body will be known for?

The answers to these questions were captured by a visual facilitator and included the following:



Effective Governance – Questions	Responses
<p>How do effective governing bodies approach their role?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With responsiveness and transparency • Learn before talking/ do your research, gathering info and data, understanding the consequences of your votes • With caution, honoring the weight of the role and your decisions • Understanding the history and past of the community and how it shapes residents’ experiences • Communicating early and often • Educating ourselves about constituents and their interests. We need to know how groups will respond or if they will support a decision. • Working toward continuous improvement
<p>How can/does the Mayor contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mayor is the face of the City and Council • The current Mayor and Vice Mayor represent the governing body well • The Mayor is a coach and leader • The Mayor is a consensus builder • He educates residents on issues at the Town Hall, even for outcomes he didn’t originally want; he approaches things as “we” • Plays a facilitator/translator role, even if he isn’t on the winning side • Runs efficient meetings/ maintains order • In his regional and national commitments, he represents Hampton well • Takes a leadership role on social media, rather than having specific Council members take the blame • He is responsive to constituents
<p>How can/does the Staff contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being responsive to concerns from constituents. Council has confidence that the City Manager and staff have their back • The City Manager is a problem solver, she wants Council to look good • Staff presents Council with well-researched policy options and choices • They provide analytical and operational expertise to inform Council’s decision-making • Staff allows Council to efficiently fulfill the community building role by providing Council information on constituent needs • Staff did a great job in the transition of new Council members • Gets things to Council in a timely manner • Staff stays out in front of issues for Council • City Manager meets with every Council member regularly, which helps Council run more smoothly • Reviews the Council agenda prior to each meeting

Effective Governance – Questions	Responses
<p>How can/do individual members of the City Council contribute to the effectiveness of the governing body?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain open communication and be responsive • Respecting each other as an individual • How does respect manifest itself in the group? Respect is earned and it looks like consensus, appreciation for each experience, collaboration, one for the team • Trusting teammates • Information sharing • Treating everyone with dignity or respect is the “secret sauce” • Being intentional • Good group chemistry and familiarity with one another
<p>What do you hope this governing body will be known for?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed decisions • Loving Hampton and its residents • Making Hampton the best it can be • Being impactful, making big decisions • HOPE for Hampton: hospitality, opportunity, prosperity, and engagement

Distinguished Citizens Award

Participants discussed ways to recognize residents’ unique contributions to the City of Hampton. The City currently offers a Hampton Heroes and the Distinguished Citizen award. The Mayor and Council would like to offer an additional, lower tier award to its residents. Participants agreed that criteria must first be established for the existing Distinguished Citizen award. These criteria will be developed by studying past award recipients and will outline whether the vote must be unanimous. Once standard criteria has been determined, an additional award will be established for Hampton residents.



Parting Thoughts

As the day came to a close, each participant was asked to share a parting thought on how they felt about the work done during the retreat and what lies ahead.

- The governance retreat was time well spent
- I feel fine
- I am leaving feeling refreshed
- Excited
- I am eager
- Ready
- I feel like this is progress
- The retreat was needed
- I am energized