

# City of Hampton

Governing Body Retreat

November 18, 2020



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**HAMPTON VA**



The City of Hampton, Virginia, held a Governing Body Retreat on November 18, 2020. The retreat was planned and facilitated by The Novak Consulting Group, now a part of Raftelis.

## Introductions & Expectations

The retreat began with the City Council and staff introducing themselves and sharing their expectations for the retreat. These expectations were captured by a graphic facilitator and included the following:

- We have one new council member, and we're four months into a new council. It's critical to understand each other, where we want to go as a Council and a City. Also, to understand what each of us wants to accomplish during our time.
- I see a new opportunity to refine the ways that we work together and accomplish the work of the City. I want to understand each other better in terms of relationships, understand where we are as a Council and as individuals – how do our different goals get woven into the process?
- This is a good opportunity to sit down in a different setting, and it's good to get to know each other. I'm very interested in strategic priorities, and for the next couple of years, there's a lot ahead of us.
- We are each unique people with different thought processes and views on what should be done. In order for us to be a productive body, we need to have norms around how we operate and treat each other, which will help each of us to meet our needs and objectives.
- It's good that the focus today is on the teambuilding process. I know all these people, but I think that understanding the team would be productive. I think that there are some ways that we can do things better and that there are some processes that we can improve.
- I don't know about expectations. I expect honest dialogue.
- I want to listen, learn, and support in the best way I can.
- I also want to better understand the Council so that I can support in an effective way.
- Each time we do a retreat like this, we come out stronger. Really appreciate everyone's willingness to devote a day.
- I'm looking forward to hearing from everyone and think it's productive to have sessions like this.



# Contemporary Trends and Council-Manager Government

Dr. John Nalbandian led a discussion related to contemporary trends in local government. Themes from that discussion are captured below. Specifically, the discussion sought to achieve the following:

- Explore disruptive forces that impact local governments and discuss the gap between what is politically acceptable and operationally sustainable
  - Connect what we want to do with what we can do
- Clarify the gap and the challenges associated with bridging the gap
  - Relate to attitudes and mindset

## Background

In the 1920s, most cities operated under a Strong Mayor form of government, where an elected mayor was granted almost total administrative authority to run the city. The appointment process was often very politicized, which, coupled with unchecked corruption, gave rise to the Progressive Movement. The Progressive Movement combined the values of efficiency and morality, and the Council-Manager form was designed to promote efficiency and good government. Today, the Council-Manager form of government accounts for about 40% of governance in communities in the United States, including the City of Hampton.

One of the key features of the Council-Manager form of government is the elimination of the separation between the Mayor and Council – they work as one governing body. This is unique to local governments, as there is no corollary at the state or federal level for this governing body concept. Rather, the structure is designed to promote collaboration and deliberation rather than partisan debate and division.



## Disruptive Forces

The phrase “disruptive forces” was chosen deliberately for today’s session. The session could have referenced “changes affecting local government,” but change doesn’t have the same impact as the word disruptive. Jim Keene, former City Manager, suggested the word disruptive because he says, “disruptive forces are inevitable.” For example, hurricanes and tornadoes will happen. However, what is not inevitable – what takes intent – is the reconciliation that is needed as the disruptive forces are made known. Reconciliation, repair, and creating new things require intent, and that intent takes place in the concept of “The Gap.”

Bob O’Neill and Dr. Nalbandian are conducting a research project and asked local government professionals about three disruptive forces:

- National politics filtering down
  - The deep division in national politics has crept into local government. City Council members want to be legislators, not members of a governing body; the art of politics is quickly disappearing.
  - Local issues are viewed through a partisan lens.
- Technology changes
  - For example, a public safety incident was reported at a local high school. Police were called, and the school put on lockdown, but parents began calling the police before they had responded to the school. How can local governments keep up when communication is diffuse and instantaneous?
- Social Issues
  - The role of local government in institutional racism
    - Institutions are being re-evaluated at all levels of government, as they can be perpetrators of racial policies, practices, and behaviors. This has led to a deepening distrust of our institutions and the people in them. For example, policing best practices are being questioned, and communities of color don’t trust the institution of the police. City departments perpetuate racist policies – from zoning and housing; experts who are part of these institutions are not trusted.
  - Political neutrality of the administrative staff is losing its value, which is provocative and needs to be examined.

## Impact on The Gap

These disruptive forces widen the gap between political acceptability and operational sustainability, making it harder to make connections and effectively run a local government. Because the gap is growing, there are leadership challenges, which require the following:

- Developing roles and responsibilities to build bridges
- Networking to develop problem-solving structures
- Rethinking the engagement process in the community and the organization
- Addressing differences between the roles of assertive and allegiant citizens
  - The assertive citizen comes prepared with information that is skewed in a particular direction; they question government’s intent and want to be heard
  - The allegiant citizen is the one who has more trust in the governing institution and is more inclined to trust the deliberative process and to be a part of that deliberation

## Leadership Challenge 1 – Roles and Responsibilities

As the gap between political and operational sustainability widens, staff are drawn into the gap. Are they prepared? It is critical for staff to participate in conversations without intruding into the political realm. For some staff, this is a challenge because they are not used to dealing with Council and with the public, and expectations are changing. Similarly, elected officials may get drawn into administrative realms.

It takes time and talent to bridge this gap, and it takes an understanding of the mindset. How does the staff-bridging role connect with the role of staff as advocates for unspoken values? For example, if Council is interested in an issue, the staff would bring information regarding the financial implications of the issue, allowing staff to address the unspoken value of fiscal integrity.

Speaking to values related to efficient and professional governance is an assumed part of staff's role. However, the question is evolving – as the assertive citizenry grows and as social issues become more pronounced, what is the role of staff in advocating for unspoken values other than efficiency?

## Leadership Challenge 2 – Structural Challenges

Readiness or resistance to change depends on the type of change being implemented. Here are the three types of change:

1. Substitutional change – typically not resisted (e.g., switching brands of soup)
2. Expected change with significant adjustment – may be resisted (e.g., kids going away to college)
3. Change that negatively affects identity – is resisted; when change is experienced as a loss of identity

How do you balance regional problem-solving and individual jurisdictional identity?

## Leadership Challenge 3 – Process Challenge/Engagement

Engagement has become an imperative in the age of the assertive citizen. This requires the development of public forums for deliberation as well as expression of voice, but who can/will speak to the unspoken values?

## Governance Roles – the Redux

When The Novak Consulting Group facilitated the City's governance retreat in 2019, the Council did an exercise related to the six roles of the governing body and identified the roles of Strategic Visioning and Community Building as focus areas for 2020. At the 2020 retreat, Council members were asked to talk about the activities that have occurred in those areas over the last year and to assess performance.

### What activities are you doing when you are Strategic Visioning?

- Identified strategic issues
- COVID-19 has limited our ability to interact with citizens, but we take time to talk to citizens to bring the appropriate issues to the table
- We've taken field trips, reviewed quarterly status reports, yearly updates from staff on strategic goals
- Made progress on specific initiatives

- Issued environmental development bonds
- Allocated funds to rain barrels
- Addressing blight – moved request through the General Assembly and took a field trip to see areas; implementation is in progress
- Economic development is proceeding well with lots of private investments
- Sports Tourism has been on hold somewhat due to COVID-19 (aquatic center, race track was used over the course of the year, improvements at Boo Williams)

### **What activities are you doing when you are Community Building?**

- Talk to different constituencies, one-on-one meetings with residents to spearhead different projects
- Serve on community boards
- Lots of community engagement around what residents are looking for from Parks and Recreation
- Unveiled solar lighting at YH Thomas

### **How have you performed as a group in this regard during the past year?**

- Considering constraints (pandemic, monetary constraints), we're doing pretty well
- Would like to have more engagement, but have done more social media engagement
  - Facebook Live with the Mayor, City Council, City Manager, Staff
- Reached out effectively electronically
- Haven't had as much neighborhood involvement

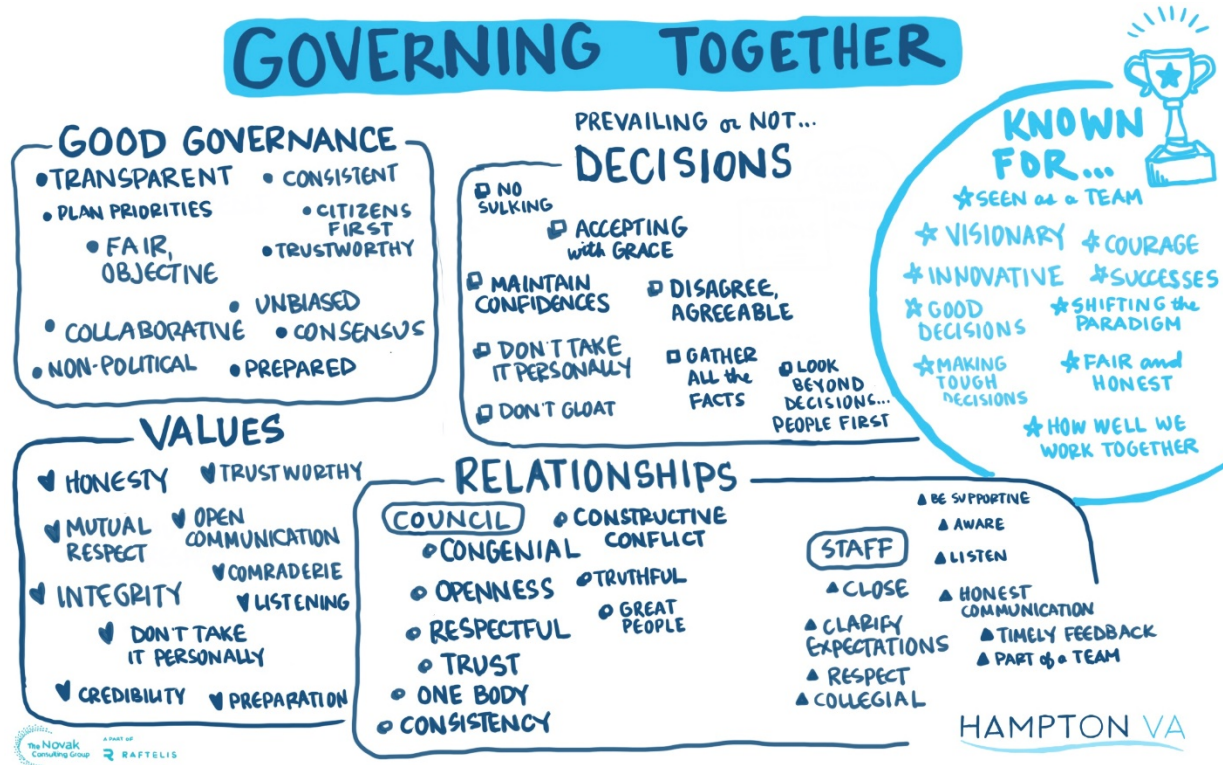
## **Governing Together**

City Council was asked to explore a series of questions about what it means to govern together.

- What does good governance look like to you?
- What values are important to you in governing?
- What is important to remember when your position is the prevailing decision, and what is important to remember when your position is not the prevailing decision?
- What type of relationship do you hope to have with your colleagues on the City Council?
- What type of relationship do you hope to have with the City Manager and Staff?
- What do you hope this governing body will be known for?

The responses are captured on this graphic map and transcribed within the following table.





Governing Together – Questions	Responses
What does good governance look like to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting our group goals first, being transparent, really putting the citizens above political gain or power</li> <li>• Fair, objective, consistent, and unbiased</li> <li>• Collaboration and consensus</li> <li>• Non-political, doing what's best for the city as a whole, not just one's constituent group; coming to a consensus and discussing issues with your peers</li> <li>• A team that gets things done the right way</li> <li>• Planning and establishing priorities, which helps keep us moving in the same direction</li> <li>• Being a team, feeling like input is valued; coming prepared to meetings to get work done</li> </ul>
What values are important to you in governing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency, honesty, mutual respect</li> <li>• Integrity, ability to agree to disagree, not take things personally</li> <li>• Honesty and respect for each other's opinions</li> <li>• Trustworthiness; open communication – silence doesn't move things forward; camaraderie</li> <li>• Willingness to listen (listening more, talking less)</li> <li>• Credibility as a body with the people that we represent</li> <li>• Being a team, being prepared; we can look beyond our decisions and see each other as people, people who love Hampton and want to do great things for our citizens as the best we can</li> </ul>



Governing Together – Questions	Responses
<p><b>What is important to remember when your position is the prevailing decision, and what is important to remember when your position is not the prevailing decision?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The decisions that we make together are better because they're made through a good relationship. If you're not on the prevailing side, you have to accept, with grace, the decision of the majority. Once a decision is made, it needs to be respected, and (if it happens in closed session) should be left there. We're each members of a body, and we make decisions together as a group. We should be able to disagree agreeably.</li> <li>• If you're out-voted or out of consensus, move on. You'll probably win as many as you lose, and keep in mind what's best for the citizens. Gather the facts and make the best decisions you can.</li> <li>• Win some, lose some – know when to hold 'em, when to fold 'em. Don't gloat if you're winning.</li> <li>• Have to walk away and not be salty about losing, especially when you've made your stance.</li> <li>• I think I learn with every vote (sometimes I beat myself up if I don't see things that my colleagues do).</li> <li>• We don't have very many split decisions in what we do – we're usually on the same page. What we can't let happen is that the few splits erode relationships that help us in the long-term. When people don't agree with me, I don't hold on to issues or take things personally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What type of relationship do you hope to have with your colleagues on the Governing Body?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collegial, congenial, respectful relationship of openness. We've done a good job with this, and our ability to work together really relies on mutual respect and trust. As we work together, we get to know each other and our own feelings on different topics.</li> <li>• Trusting, consistency, respect for each other's decisions and viewpoints. Conflict is inevitable but should be as constructive as possible (criticism as well).</li> <li>• Recognize each other's passions and support constituents – respect each other and have the discussions that are conducted in a way that allows us to move on.</li> <li>• I'd like for my colleagues to like me (and I know I'm not always likeable) – if I say something, I want my colleagues to trust my word. I'd like to get to know each other better and better understand what makes me think what I think.</li> <li>• I want to constantly be learning from each other, and I enjoy working with them.</li> <li>• I want us to be a team. I'm not always the most confident person, but I try, and I try to make sure that everyone is aware of what's out there and what's being decided.</li> </ul>
<p><b>What type of relationship do you hope to have with the City Administrator and Staff?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to be close and we need to make expectations known so that they are able to perform with excellence. We govern as one, but we are seven people. We have to be understanding. With the rest of the staff, they work for Mary, Cheran, or Katherine – I don't expect to have a personal relationship with any of the others.</li> <li>• We have three staff – open and honest communication, constructive. criticism, timely feedback.</li> <li>• The relationship with each is different.</li> <li>• We're all part of a team – we can't move forward without a great deal of advice and support from the staff. Yes, we have three staff, but I have worked with folks at different levels of the City – I try to be open when I'm communicating with anyone outside of the three staff members and to let the City Manager know what's happening.</li> <li>• Relationship with City Manager staff is great – they keep us moving in the right direction.</li> </ul>

Governing Together – Questions	Responses
<p><b>What do you hope this governing body will be known for?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I've had experiences where I've gotten up and not wanted to go to work. I don't want to put additional pressure on staff, but I do want to listen when folks have issues. I want people to be able to do their jobs, feel supported, go home, and feel good about what they're doing.</li> <li>• Taking a time in Hampton's history, a real time of disruption, and doing innovative, visionary things that people will look back on and recognize as successful and courageous. Our time together is short, and I feel a sense of urgency.</li> <li>• Our time is limited, but 5-10 years from now, I hope that we'll be recognized for good decisions that benefit the community and the residents of Hampton.</li> <li>• Making tough decisions and helping Hampton be a better Hampton.</li> <li>• Being bold, shifting the paradigm in this community – what Hampton is and really what Hampton could be.</li> <li>• Fair, open, honest. I want to be known for listening to people – I'm a social butterfly. I think that we're known as a business-friendly City Council.</li> <li>• How well we worked together. I don't want to be known for going off the rails and having tense relationships with each other.</li> <li>• Sometimes when you vote, you lose, and you still have to go out and support the decision. I own my council decisions. I want people to see us as a team that's making good progress. I think that people are seeing positive things in our communities.</li> </ul>

### Council Norms

Council members discussed internal norms related to closed session. Each Council member affirmed that discussions in closed session should remain in closed session and should not be shared more widely. If Council members feel that this norm has been violated, they should address it with their colleague(s) directly. Additionally, the Council addressed interest in developing a set of written operating norms to help guide future behavior and institutionalize the values of the governing body.



## Revisiting Council Expectations

During the 2019 retreat, one exercise focused on expectations – e.g., what do Council members need from their colleagues to be successful? What are they willing to give to their colleagues? This exercise was revisited in 2020, and the results were captured in the following graphic and table. New expectations are in bold.



Prompt	Expectation	Focus Areas Moving Forward
What does the Council expect/need from their Council colleagues in order to be effective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear, honest communication                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information sharing</li> <li>○ Honest feedback</li> <li>○ Transparency</li> <li>○ Communication of vision</li> <li>○ Communication of expectations</li> <li>○ Active listening</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaboration and team building                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Collegial atmosphere</li> <li>○ Sharing of ideas</li> <li>○ Opportunities for Council members to get to know each other</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Respect                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Each other</b></li> <li>○ <b>Established norms</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Timely responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Active listening</li> <li>• Being collegial</li> <li>• Honest feedback</li> </ul>

Prompt	Expectation	Focus Areas Moving Forward
<p><b>What are Council members willing to give their colleagues?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Be prepared for meetings</b></li> <li>• <b>Share your hopes/aspirations/ expectations</b></li> <li>• Input and feedback               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Benefit of their expertise</li> <li>○ Honesty</li> <li>○ Sharing of Council members' passion and vision</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Listening and consideration               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Active listening</li> <li>○ Respectful discussion</li> <li>○ Understand others' positions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaboration and support</li> <li>• <b>Respect confidentiality</b></li> <li>• <b>Trust</b></li> <li>• <b>Commitment to staying in our lane</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dive more into sharing passion and vision</li> <li>• Look at reducing length of agenda (or extending the time allocated, with consideration for those who have full-time positions) to allow for more processing/sharing – look for alternative information delivery options</li> </ul>
<p><b>What does the Council expect/need from the Mayor in order to be effective?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow Councilmembers to finish and not be cut off prematurely</li> <li>○ Extend the same courtesy to everyone</li> <li>○ Respect for the position of Mayor</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Well-run meetings               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow enough time for a robust discussion</li> <li>○ Ensure everyone can provide input</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Be the face of the City but for City Council to be brought into these opportunities</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not discussed</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is the Council willing to give the Mayor?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Represent the City               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participate in regional meetings</li> <li>○ Represent the Council where necessary</li> <li>○ <b>Take advantage of opportunities for Council to be more present in the community</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Honest feedback</li> <li>• Respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inventory groups meeting by Zoom, look for opportunities for Council to participate</li> <li>• Spread out participation to broaden reach and outside organizations' access to Council</li> </ul>
<p><b>What does the Council expect/need from the staff to be effective?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information and analysis               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Timely information</li> <li>○ Comprehensive information</li> <li>○ Concise information</li> <li>○ Analysis of expected outcomes of decisions</li> <li>○ <b>No rush jobs</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes (what does success look like) and impacts</li> </ul>

Prompt	Expectation	Focus Areas Moving Forward
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Tell us what we need to know – informed counsel (don’t just tell Council what staff thinks Council wants to hear)</b></li> <li>● Understanding of issues               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Knowledge of other activities happening in the City</li> <li>○ Understanding of the Council’s role</li> <li>○ Understanding of the bigger picture</li> <li>○ <b>Council needs to be able to ask, “Is there anything else that we haven’t considered?”</b></li> <li>○ <b>Specific recommendations with rationale</b></li> <li>○ <b>Timetable for completion, milestones</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>● Responsiveness               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Timely responses to the Council</li> <li>○ Timely responses to stakeholders</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Preparation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Anticipate questions that the Council may ask</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Problem solving</li> </ul>	
<p><b>What is the Council willing to give the staff?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A clear vision and clear direction that is communicated throughout the organization</li> <li>● Honest feedback</li> <li>● Support</li> <li>● Resources</li> <li>● Trust</li> <li>● Understanding               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Understanding of employees’ concerns</li> <li>○ Understanding of departments’ internal visions</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Commitment to staying in our lane</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not discussed</li> </ul>
<p><b>What does the staff expect/need from the Council?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear expectations and a clear vision               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Consensus on clear direction</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>● Appreciation of resource limitations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prioritization</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Defined roles of the Council and staff</li> <li>● Trust</li> <li>● Engagement</li> <li>● Support</li> <li>● Patience</li> <li>● Advance communication</li> <li>● Understanding of the issues</li> <li>● Equal treatment of all staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not discussed</li> </ul>
<p><b>What is the staff willing to give the Council?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information and analysis</li> <li>● Respect</li> <li>● Support</li> <li>● Options</li> <li>● Policy implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not discussed</li> </ul>

Prompt	Expectation	Focus Areas Moving Forward
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accurately carry out Council direction</li> <li>• Implement policies in a timely manner</li> <li>• Recognize when policy has shifted</li> <li>• Recommendations and guidance</li> <li>• High-quality performance and dedication</li> <li>• Engagement with the Council</li> <li>• Dialogue with the Council</li> <li>• Sharing of issues facing departments</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> <li>• Defined roles of the Council and staff</li> <li>• Engagement with the community</li> <li>• Understanding of the issues</li> <li>• Creative ideas</li> <li>• <b>Push back when Council has asked too much – all requests shouldn't be treated as equal</b></li> <li>• <b>Speak truth to power and speak to the unspoken values</b></li> </ul>	

## Strategic Priorities

City Council members had the opportunity to add to the existing strategic priorities. The new strategies are captured in bold below, and staff will work to develop related work plans.

- Economic Base Growth
- Living with the Water
- Placemaking
  - **Leverage smooth jazz events and Hampton's legacy**
- Educated and Engaged Citizenry
- Safe and Clean Community
  - **Evaluate staffing for Community Development to support service level targets**
  - **Be intentional about reducing blight and promoting housing options**
- Economic Empowerment and Self Sufficiency
- Good Government
  - **Develop a strategy to pay employees a living wage**





## Closing

When the day came to a close, each person was invited to share their feelings about the day's activities.

- Always time well-spent. Gives us a chance to sit down and focus on ourselves and our working relationships.
- Got a lot out of the afternoon session. We need to spend more time together outside of Council.
- Good sharing of information, and this was good teambuilding for the group. Even some of the harder discussions were challenging, but good.
- I appreciated the afternoon session – it has made us stronger, and I feel good about it.
- I love the City. I think I'm where I'm supposed to be, and I love working with you.
- I enjoy working with all of you, and I learn more about everyone and their vision and enjoy having the opportunity to support this.
- I now see the connectivity between the morning session and the afternoon. It wasn't immediately clear. This felt very productive, and we had some honest discussions, and we're better for it. We're a great group, staff is very diligent, and we have nothing but good things to work toward.
- I think that you're an incredible group, and I never doubt anyone's commitment to Hampton. We may not always agree (and we shouldn't always agree), but I never doubt this. There are plenty of places that are all 4-3 votes, and it's always the same four and the same three. Even when we have 4-3 votes, it's not the same people, and it shows that you folks are very thoughtful. Days like today really reinforce this. The morning part of the session was professional development for all of us, which is valuable as we get into the specifics of today.
- It makes us stronger whenever we have this time together and reminds us of our common bond. I'd like for us to spend more time together, but let's reconnect to having that social time. We do enjoy each other, and we'll be better as a team and better as one voice when we better understand each other. Looking forward to producing results.
- Great Council, great team, and we can accomplish great things for our City. This allowed us to reconnect and recommit.