

# City of Des Moines, WA

## City Council Strategic Planning Workshop Summary

Held February 26-27, 2026

The City of Des Moines (City), Washington, held a City Council strategic planning workshop on February 26-27, 2026. The workshop was planned and facilitated by Raftelis.

The table below lists the members of the Des Moines City Council and Leadership Team who participated in the retreat. Other members of the City’s staff were present to observe and answer questions when needed.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yoshiko Grace Matsui, Mayor</li> <li>• Gene Achziger, Deputy Mayor</li> <li>• Harry Steinmetz, Councilmember</li> <li>• JC Harris, Councilmember</li> <li>• Jeremy Nutting, Councilmember</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pierre Blosse, Councilmember</li> <li>• Robyn Desimone, Councilmember</li> <li>• Katherine Caffrey, City Manager</li> <li>• Tim George, City Attorney</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

# Day One

## Setting the Stage

The retreat began with City Manager Katherine Caffrey welcoming the group and expressing gratitude for taking the time to participate in the workshop. The facilitator then reviewed the agenda and meeting norms.

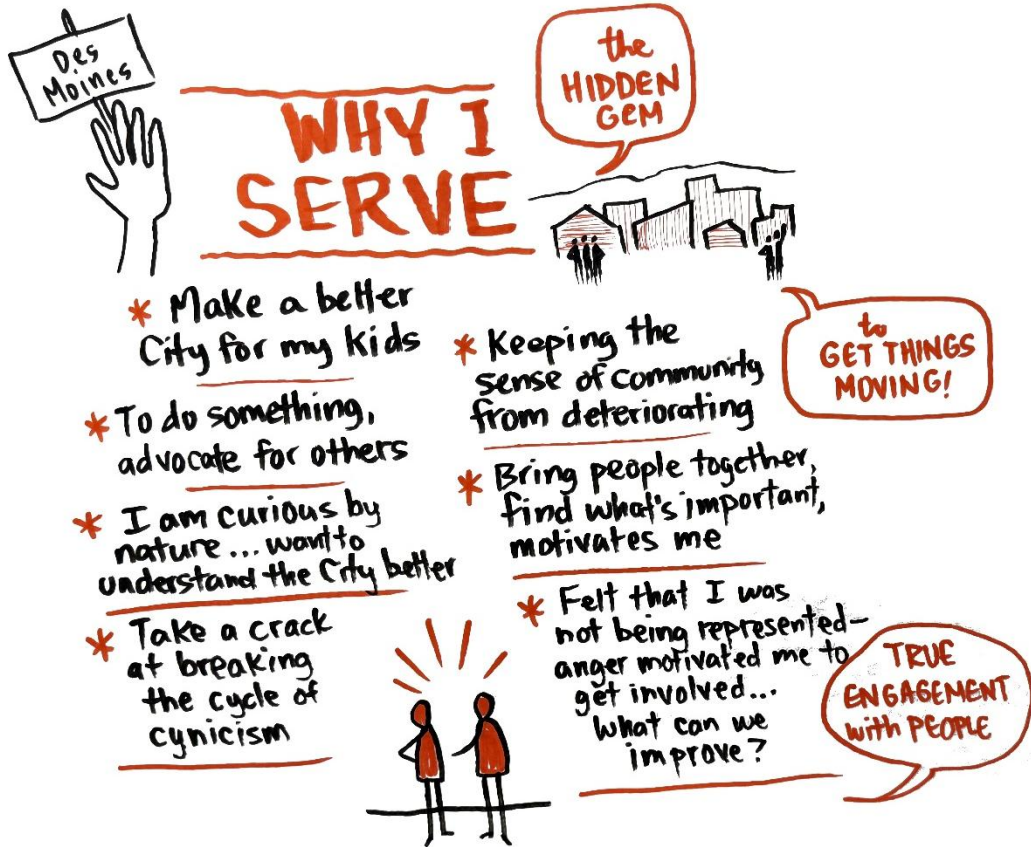
Next, members of the City Council and staff introduced themselves by sharing their hopes for the workshop. The most common theme was getting to know and understand one another. Participants were also asked to share what they love about the City of Des Moines. Details of the conversation are captured in the image to the right.



- New Council excitement
- Love & Hate for stairs project
- Move Downtown forward
- People want to be engaged
- Hyper local concerns by neighborhood
- Keep the progress going!
- Budget concerns
- Hope for new businesses
- Love the neighborhood feel
- Love the Community events
- Airport noise/traffic
- Cynicism - less optimism for future

Next, the facilitator asked members of the Council to share what they are hearing from the community, as captured in the image to the left.

As a final introductory activity, Councilmembers were asked to share their personal motivation for serving on the City Council. While many were driven by a sense of community and desire to make a difference, others were driven by frustration that blossomed into a commitment to doing their part to improve the City of Des Moines. A graphic summary of the conversation is included on the following page.



## Council-Manager Form of Government

The facilitator provided a review of the Council-Manager form of government. As illustrated in the diagram below, local government professional management operates at the intersection of what is politically acceptable—often driven by Council priorities—and administratively sustainable—what the organization has the capacity and ability to accomplish.



The Council-Manager model features a governing body that acts as a whole, with the City Manager acting as a liaison between Council and staff. Most U.S. governance models feature a separation of powers to create checks and balances to prevent bad things from happening, while the Council-Manager form of government unifies power to facilitate good outcomes through collaboration and political stability.

The City’s organizational chart places citizens at the top of the hierarchy, electing the Mayor and Council as a unified governing body that represents the community. The City Manager acts as a “buffer,” balancing political priorities and operational efficiency and effectiveness. Operating in the gap between political acceptability and operational sustainability, the City Manager plays the role of “bridge builder.”

## Council Roles and Effectiveness

In 2016, Julia Novak and Dr. John Nalbandian identified six roles that the City Council must fulfill as the governing body. A strong governing body benefits from members who gravitate toward different roles, creating a more dynamic and well-rounded team. This diversity of strengths ensures that all aspects of governance receive appropriate attention

and energy, allowing Council to collectively address the full spectrum of leadership responsibilities more effectively than if all members gravitated toward the same role. Definitions of each role are provided below:

**Strategic/Vision – Big Picture Thinker:** The focus here is on decisions that can have a significant impact on the City. Can be long-term or short-term; often focuses on the future and what might make a significant difference; sees possible connections and relationships; thinks beyond present data and constraints.

**Trustee – Steward:** While listening to and respecting constituent views, the trustee feels responsible to the City as a whole and to future residents. The trustee will make uncomfortable decisions that may run counter to constituent wishes because the decision is in the interest of the greater good.

**Community Builder – Bringing People Together:** In the community builder role, the Councilmember focuses on relationships and consensus-building. The community builder fosters relationships and is able to work through differences. Community is not just a casual word to the Councilmember who gravitates to this role.

**Representative – Constituent Advocate:** In this role, the Councilmember acts as a “customer service representative.” The Councilmember is a conduit between citizens and the City services. Often, residents see this Councilmember as responsive to their individual concerns.

**Oversight:** In this role, the focus is on the accountability of staff to the Council.

**Decision-Maker:** The decision-maker sees his/her role much like a judge—information is presented, and the decision-maker votes it up or down. This is not an easy role, but often it is a more passive role in contrast to that of the community builder.

Key takeaways from the conversation are captured in the following graphic:

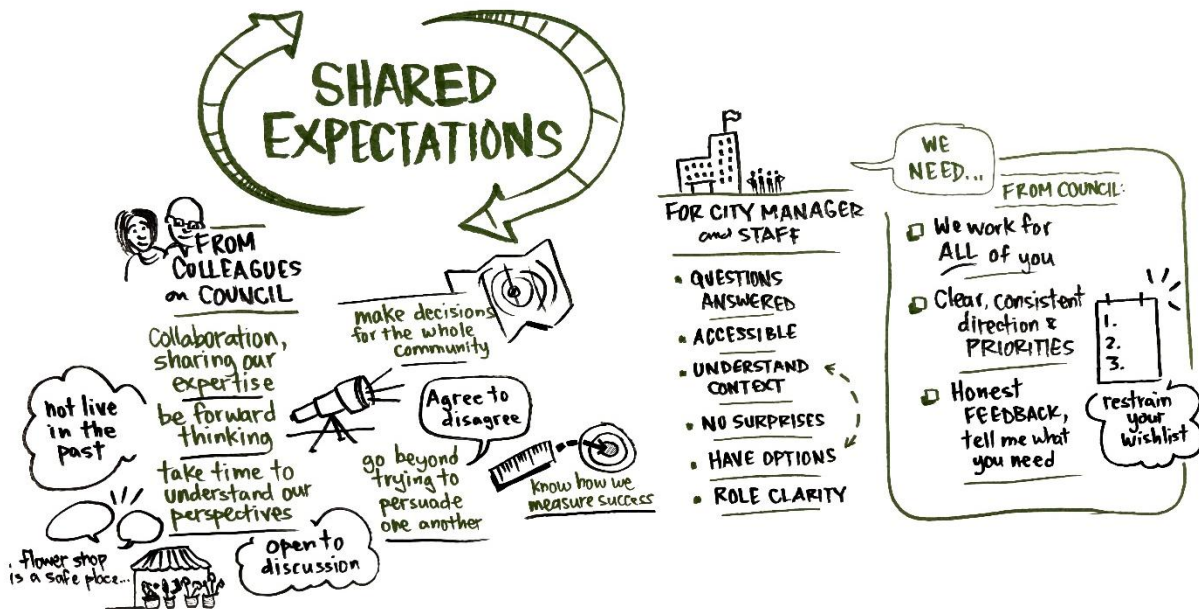


## Sharing Expectations

Participants reflected on the expectations they have for one another as they move toward governing together. Discussion questions included:

- As a governing body, what do you need from each other in order to be successful?
- What do you need from the City Manager and staff in order to be successful?
- What does the City Manager and staff need from the City Council?

Council expressed a desire for collaboration among their colleagues, spending the necessary time needed for in-depth discussions, and being forward-thinking. They appreciate staff providing context, options, and being accessible. When asked what is needed from the Council, the City Manager highlighted the importance of clear and consistent direction, honest feedback, and an understanding of the resource and capacity constraints under which City staff are operating. Additional details from the conversation are included in the following graphic:



Members of the Council were also invited to share what they hope this City Council will be known for in the future. The most common theme was moving the City forward by accomplishing projects/goals and being effective.

## Closing

At the close of the first day, participants shared one word about how they were feeling. Responses included *hopeful*, *encouraged*, and *positive*.

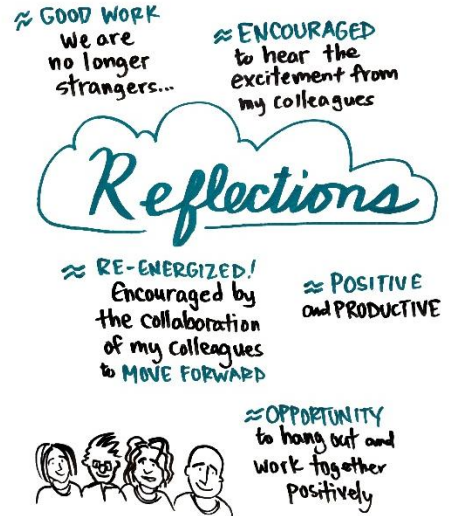


# Day Two

## Setting the Stage

Staff and Councilmembers shared reflections on Day One, expressing excitement about the collaboration and positive environment. The full list of reflections is detailed in the image to the right.

As a warm-up activity, participants created newspaper headlines captured in the image below that they would like to see written about Des Moines five years from today.

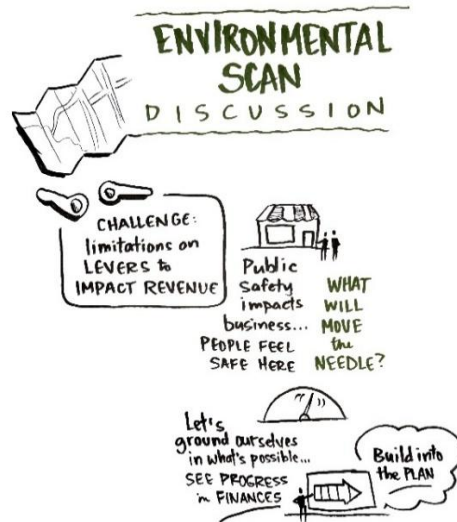


## Context Setting

The facilitator provided an overview of the strategic planning process and a framework for establishing a shared vision and strategic focus areas. As part of this process, the following engagement activities previously took place:

- Individual interviews with members of the Council
- Community focus groups
- An online survey distributed to City staff
- An online survey made available to members of the Des Moines community
- A Town Hall meeting

The facilitator reviewed the key themes from these activities, as well as contextual information regarding local trends in Des Moines, and led the group in a conversation reflecting on them.



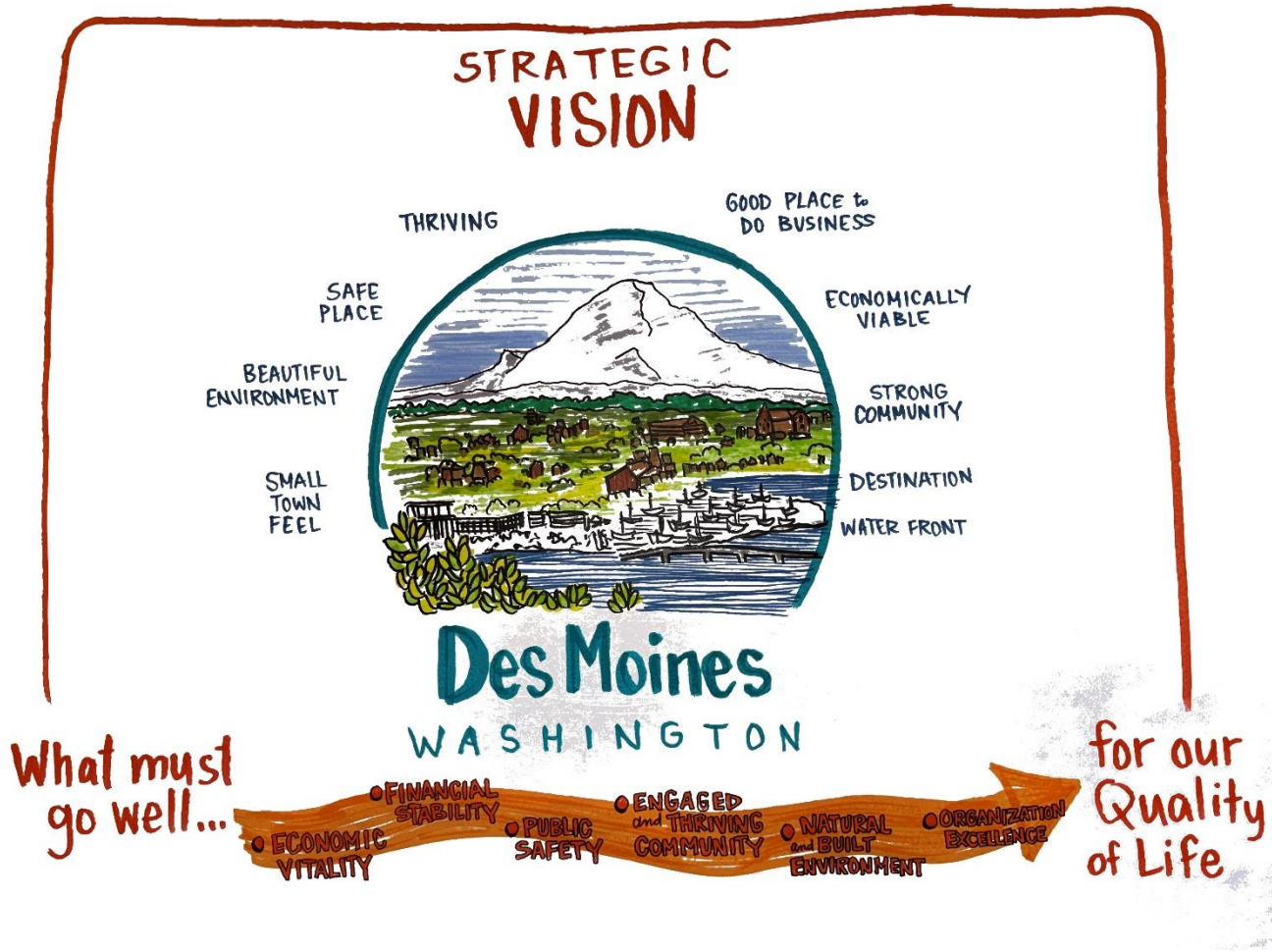
## A Deeper Dive: Economic Development

City staff presented information regarding Economic Development in Des Moines and engaged the Council in robust conversation about their goals for the future, desired priority areas, and potential trade-offs. Council discussed their priority of seeing development in the downtown corridor and creating density to entice people to the area. Other highlights from the conversation included the need to generate revenue regardless of the geographical area, ensuring site readiness for incoming developers, and creating predictable and efficient permitting processes. Additional highlights are captured in the image below.



## Vision for Des Moines

The City Council was asked to think about things that are true about Des Moines today that they hope will still be true in 10 years, as well as things that are not true about Des Moines today that they would like to be true in 10 years. The graphic on the following page illustrates the high-level themes that emerged from the exercise, which became the proposed strategic focus areas for consideration in the City's new strategic plan.



## Next Steps

The Raftelis team will refine a proposed strategic framework based on the conversations and input received during the workshop. The framework will be refined with City staff and brought back for Council to review at a future workshop.

## Closing

As the retreat came to a close, participants were asked to share a reflection on their time together. Members of the Council found value in their time together, expressed excitement about the future, and are optimistic about creative ideas to move the City forward.