

2016 AUGUSTA CITY COUNCIL GOALS AND ACTIONS (FINAL DRAFT ADOPTED 2/18/16)



INTRODUCTION

Augusta City Government had significant achievements in 2015 with respect to all of its annual goals. Achievements included:

- The opening of Cony Flatiron housing, and approval of Hodgkins School housing
- Assistance to Maine Instrument Flight in building a new hangar
- Groundbreaking for Western Avenue hotel
- Construction underway on Lithgow expansion
- Hiring of two detectives to investigate drug trafficking
- Increasing the MDOT commitment to the Mount Vernon Street project from \$1.2 to \$4.0 million
- Revising Hospital Street road project to include reconstruction of sidewalks and curbs
- Drafting of Historic Protection ordinance
- Institution of vacant properties registry
- Testing and adoption of single stream recycling program with EcoMaine.

Still, though progress was made on all goals, there were so many recommended actions in 2015 that some have not been addressed. This year, in order to create more focus, the Mayor and Council have only included goals and actions that have the support of a majority of Council members (5). Those ideas which did not make the list are not dead for 2016; any councilor or councilors can bring up any idea at any time during the year. It just means that those ideas are not Council-wide goals for achievement in 2016. The list of actions that were proposed, but not supported by a majority of Council members, is provided in the Appendix to this report.

On the other side of the coin, some of the goals and actions which are included on the list were not unanimously supported at the retreat. All councilors, whether they supported or opposed the inclusion of these goals and actions at the retreat, have the right to oppose these ideas when they come up on a Council agenda during 2016.

GOAL A: CONTINUE THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUG ADDICTION AND CRIME

The drug crisis continued to worsen in Maine in 2015. The state was on pace to set a record for drug overdose deaths. It's happening in Augusta and Kennebec County just as it elsewhere in Maine and the country.

Following the prioritization of drug abuse at last year's Council goal-setting retreat, the City conducted public forums and hired two new detectives. In addition, staff from both the City and the School department have played leading roles in the activities of the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention (a project of Healthy Communities of the Capital Area).

The price of drug abuse in the area remains high. The fallout includes increased robberies, babies born with defects, school children suffering from neglect and abuse, and some high school students becoming addicted themselves. For this reason, the Council once more prioritized addressing the drug crisis as one of its top goals.

There was much discussion of what the Council can do, and how the Council can do it in a way which is coordinated with other partners – particularly neighboring municipalities. The conclusion was that more thought is needed about the best way for City government to address the issue.

Action A1. The City Manager shall work with staff to deliver a draft action plan on drugs to City Council in March, 2016. That plan shall consider:

- the potential need for a detox center in Augusta
- the need for training for teachers, parents, and others in identifying and addressing people with drug issues whom they encounter
- the mechanics of creating/linking to a website providing resources to those who are dealing with drug abuse and its effects (see Action A2)
- ways of coordinating with state efforts and maximizing the use of state resources
- the potential need for someone on-site in the schools to coordinate with agencies
- the potential need for an expanded health curriculum to deal with drug use
- the potential need for more neighborhood watch groups
- the need to assist support groups of parents and family members of abusers
- the need to engage medical professionals and neighborhood organizations
- the need to engage other area municipalities to join into the effort

The draft plan should be available in time to be presented to the community forum scheduled for March 30, 2016.

Action A2. In 2016, City government will develop and/or link to a web site to provide resources and help to family members, professionals, and individuals dealing with drug issues and their effects. The website will list resources and telephone numbers, and provide general information on addiction, how to identify it, and how to address it.

GOAL B: PROMOTE THE LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AUGUSTA

Augusta has had great success in individual economic development projects in the past year. However, a long-term challenge remains. Central Maine has an aging population, and slow job growth overall compared to the rest of the state and nation. The City must be proactive in anticipating these challenges.

Action B1. The newly-established Augusta Economic and Workforce Development Committee shall assist City staff to take advantage of development opportunities. These opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- the Kennebec Locke at Head Tide site (see <http://augustamatters.com/2012/03/05/the-kennebec-locke-at-head-tide/>)
- the Arsenal site
- Riggs Brook
- former MDOT garage site (behind the Capitol building)

Action B2. City government shall achieve “Certified Local Government” status by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. This status will enable Augusta to qualify for grants and assistance in the redevelopment of historic properties.

Action B3. City Council shall hold an informational meeting to learn from a representative of the AARP (American Association of Retired People) about what it would take to receive a designation as an “Age-Friendly Community,” and what benefits would come from that designation. For background on this issue, see <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/network-age-friendly-communities/info-2014/an-introduction.html>

Action B4. Support the redevelopment of the Colonial Theater and the northern end of Water Street. It is not known at this time what kind of support the Colonial Theater needs from City government to be successful. At this time the Council is reaffirming its support for the project and for what it could mean for the economy of downtown Augusta, while reserving the ability to critically evaluate and decide upon any future requests for actual assistance.

Action B5. Support the establishment of a “Creative Coalition” in Augusta. With progress on the Colonial Theater, the recent announcement of a news museum at the former Gannett house, the increased level of activity at the University of Maine at Augusta facility on Water Street, and the soon-to-be restored and expanded Lithgow Library, a critical mass of cultural activities is arising in Augusta. The establishment of a coalition of cultural groups to brand, coordinate, and market arts and cultural activities in Augusta would be a support to local economic activity.

GOAL C: CONTINUE TO IMPROVE THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This section consists mainly of follow-ups to actions initiated in the 2015 goal-setting meeting, and taking them to the next steps.

Action C1. Approve and enforce the proposed property maintenance ordinance. The housing economy is improving, but there are still deteriorated properties with absentee owners in the city that present safety and fire hazards, and take away from the property values of neighboring homeowners. The Council should consider final technical adjustments to the ordinance which was developed last year, prior to enactment.

Action C2. Enact the proposed historic ordinance. This has been worked on for several years, and is now at a point where it is ready for enactment.

Action C3. Create a Complete Streets committee with the charge of drafting a proposed complete streets policy for Council consideration. Complete streets are streets that can readily accommodate bicyclers and pedestrians as well as cars. For more detail, see <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets>.

GOAL D: SUPPORT THOSE IN NEED

Action D1. Sustain the effort of the newly-formed working group to address childhood hunger and homelessness. The working group is coordinating the efforts of the City, the School Department, and area social service agencies to help meet the needs of those in need in the city. It held a community forum in the fall of 2016, and is meeting regularly to address these issues.

GOAL E: IMPROVE COUNCIL PROCESSES

Action E1. The City Manager and staff shall analyze the current City government dependence upon the fund balance to supplement the operating budget, and suggest possible plans or policies to reduce this dependence in the future. Right now the City has a comfortable fund balance that amounts to 12% of the annual budget. However, these funds are being used every year to supplement the annual budget, so that tax increases can be minimized. At the current trend, in three years or so the fund balance won't be available in the same amounts, and it will create upward pressure on taxes.

Action E2. The Mayor and Council shall review existing policies governing membership on City government-established committees, and make appropriate changes. For some committees, like Fort Western and Lithgow Library, it is appropriate for non-residents to serve as members. City staff will review membership and membership criteria for all city committees, and provide the information to the Mayor and Council for their deliberation.

APPENDIX: PROPOSED ACTIONS THAT DID NOT RECEIVE MAJORITY COUNCIL SUPPORT.

1. Add an additional code officer, to be paid for from fees.
2. Pass a plastic bag ordinance
3. Study two-way traffic on Water Street
4. Plant trees along Western Avenue
5. Study long-term municipal solid waste and recycling options
6. Educate taxpayers about how cuts in state aid affect property taxes
7. Update the comprehensive plan
8. Create an arts district downtown

Any of these proposals may be re-raised in the coming year by individual councilors.