

Big G in Conversation Measuring our success: July 13, 2021

Wendy King

Welcome to Big G. In conversations, the podcast should be inside.

Wendy King

Hi I'm Wendy King and on today's show we're talking with the folks from Strategy, Innovation and Intergovernmental Service is about measuring the city of Guelph success and creating a performance and data driven culture. Let's get started.

Wendy King

Welcome joining me today is Jody Sales, General Managers, Strategy Innovation and Inter-governmental Services and also Daniel Beamsigne, Strategy and Performance Reporting Advisor. Thank you both for your time.

Jody Sales

Thanks so much for having us

Daniel Beamsigne

Thanks Wendy

Wendy King

So I guess to start maybe just a bit of a definition. So what is the strategic plan and what is its importance to the overall organization and to council?

Jody Sales

Well, our strategic plan is the guiding document for our organization. It lists our strategic priority areas. The actions will take to support them and how we're going to measure our success against our goals.

Jody Sales

I like to think of it as our North Star. It's some clarity really on where we're going and how we're going to get there.

Wendy King

I love that as your Northstar because I can just imagine there's a million moving parts, but you have to keep your eyes kind of centered on the overall plan, right?

Jody Sales

Absolutely, and I think our CAO would tell you over the last few years. Certainly lots of unprecedented challenges for the municipality and our strategic plan has helped us stay focused on our key goals while managing the impacts of the pandemic on the community and and for Council, I think they're able to see their goals and the goals of the Community reflected in the actions and the work coming out of City Hall every single day.

Wendy King

What would you say is the impact of getting their first progress report done?

Jody Sales

I mean, a huge breath of relief for Daniel and I, for sure, but go ahead. Daniel

Daniel

yeah, so, as Jody said, it was a huge sigh of relief for us because the progress report is the create first cut of data. We got a whole bunch of departments working together behind the scenes to show how we as a city are doing based on the goals that we've set for ourselves in 2019. It really was a great way to breakdown silos throughout the organization and have us all work together to evaluate our progress.

Daniel Beamsigne

Council reaction was very positive. We took it last week and it, June 29th there were relatively few questions. But as always with these things, once you present data, there's always a request for more data and it just shows. It just goes to show that this is what's what's required to make meaningful decisions for the Community in Guelph and the public response has been very good as well in terms of impact.

Daniel Beamsigne

Uh, our web team has sent me some stats and as of June 29th there been over 200 unique page views and almost 10,000 people who seem to link through Twitter or Facebook.

Wendy King

That's amazing, yeah, that's amazing. So what what would you say has been done to get the plan kind of, off the page and into people's lives?

Jody Sales

So from the beginning we really thought of the strategic plan is a collaborative exercise with all of our partners, including the Community and our strategic plan is informed by the Community plan. So Guelph's a community with a 25 year overarching longer term vision of the goals it wants to achieve and the strategic plan is the city's piece of that. From a staff perspective, we're working hard in the organization to make sure that everyone can see themselves in the plan and the work that they do every single day and and so for new joiners to the organization. We're we're talking about the strategic plan from day one. So then in the very early days of their job they can think about how they can make impact on our strategic plan, but also where they fit.

Wendy King

I I thought it was fascinating in the notes that you sent that there was something called. I think it's called a 1-pager that goes out to everybody, whether they're a new staff or or whatever. Tell me little bit about that.

Jody Sales

It's actually become a bit of our a contest on some of our Webex meetings where people hold them up, but we have a great little one pager that shows sort of all of the key strategic priority areas and some of the main actions and measures. And so if you're in a meeting and you're talking about something and you're trying to figure out where it fits in the organization, we have this really cool quick reference for folks. It also helps us start our presentations to the community and to our stakeholders. Really kind of place setting for everybody. How this fits into where we're trying to go as an organization. Of course. Our strategic plan is called Guelph future ready. And so for us. This is all about getting ready for what's to come.

Wendy King

It's a great idea because I think a lot of us in our day to day jobs you get kinda. You're so focused on what you're doing. But you guys are saying no, there's a big picture and it's all gonna fit together.

Wendy King

So I you know, I know you're always moving forward and modernizing, and obviously none of that changes overnight. So ah, you had mentioned that you have a a long term timeframe but do you have timelines as we go along as well?

Jody Sales

For sure, so we have a progress report, but it's not an annual report, and so as our Council and our public get more used to seeing data from us, we'll see more regular reporting. So more than just annual progress reporting on our strategic plan, the strategic plan does kind of spend this life for this term of Council. So there's there's. There's a four-year window there to accomplish it and evaluate it, and then build on it in our next strategic plan. And you know, of course, some of the goals in the plan. Are really long term in very ambitious, like the city's commitment to carbon neutral by 2050, and so we have some interim targets and and sort of a longer-term goal that we're trying to achieve which is compatible with our Community plan goals as well.

Wendy King

And as you were kind of alluded to earlier, I mean some things just put a monkey wrench into everything. You can have all kinds of great plans, but then COVID comes along. So how do you like, You know, maneuver that?

Jody Sales

Well, I mean there are things we had to pause and there are things that we accelerated. For example, the desire to have more digital service offerings for folks through COVID really expanded and so our customer service team certainly transformed some of their service delivery. And that was probably accelerated because of COVID. And there were other things that we would normally do in person with folks that we had to put a pause on and and so those things have slowed down. Part of what we learn from our progress report is maybe where where we need to have ramp back up as you know, public health allows us to, but I think the timing of right now as an opportunity to check in is really good as sort of the world starts to open up around us and and we have a good sense of where we've accelerated and where maybe we need to continue to invest. And of course all of this is tied to the City's multiyear budget which I know you guys have talked about on this podcast before and we have this analogy where the budget is the gas pedal for all of the things that we want to achieve and and so I think you can sort of see how all these things knit so nicely together.

Wendy King

What's what do you think comes next in your future ready plan?

Jody Sales

Well, our key performance indicators right now or at the highest strategic level. There are 19 of them and as Council and the public it used to seeing this kind of data from us. They're really interested in the departmental level and some of our service area data, so you'll see us dig in for the rest of this year with our departments on sort of their services and operations and how we can measure those and report on

them and refine them as we learn. So that's the next phase of work for us and we're pretty excited about it.

Wendy King

So you just did. You're 1 presentation you were mentioning, so there's another presentation, obviously to come.

Jody Sales

And I think we think the departmental service level data is something we may use behind the scenes for a while. You know the cogs in the machine that just keep the operation going and so they may be less public facing than our strategic plan data, which of course you know is all the things that we've committed to to get to our public goals. But operationally, I think we know that there's some. There's a real opportunity for us to dig into data and improve our service delivery, and that'll be the next phase of our work.

Wendy King

It always amazes me, Alex. I think you said you look at a 25-year plan and I'm like I don't know how anybody plans for next week, let alone 25 years. That's gotta be a special. You have a special technique for that I guess.

Jody Sales

Well, it community plan is some bigger goals, but certainly we're even refining those as we go. So and including with our strategic plan, there's a real refocus on being and being equitable in Community, and being equitable in our service delivery. And so we've been agile to add those sorts of things into both our strategic plan. And right now, having conversations with the community about how we can be a community that sets the goal for the elimination of systemic racism in Guelph so we do have big, large, lofty goals that sort of reflect the climate and the times were in. And I think we're proud of our ability to adapt and not just have a plan that's carved in stone that we never look at or adjust.

Wendy King

Yeah, we had a really I thought interesting podcast with your anti-racism group. It was just really fascinating and so proactive and and you know, as, you know, as the news happens and you not maybe expecting it, the things like residential schools and all of that. There there's a part for the city to play, obviously.

Jody Sales

Yeah, and you know like every municipality we're figuring this out and we're working with our community. We like to do it in a community led City supported kind of way. But the fact that we're starting to see equitable service delivery reflected in our strategic plan and looking for new ways to measure and evaluate that and really make sure that we're being true to the goals that we set is something we're pretty proud of.

Wendy King

And so do you do, uh, like, how do you do that departmentally? Do you go department by department to determine what their views should be? Or I mean, maybe they are inputting to you. Maybe that's how it goes?

Jody Sales

Yeah, I think all of the folks who deliver service every day at the city want to do it in the best way we can for our community. And so I think this has been a real opportunity for people to pause and think about their individual services and the people that they're interacting with and how we're doing it and listen to our customers and our residents about the experiences are having and and adapt accordingly.

Wendy King

So Daniel, I meant to ask too what exactly if you can describe it for me, is data driven culture?

Daniel Beamsigne

Select data driven culture is is where we figure out how we're doing based on numbers. Of course, numbers aren't the only thing you can't have numbers of that and narrative and you can't have narrative with the numbers and I know it sounds like cliches, but it really is a great way for people to get a complete holistic look at how they're doing and how we're doing. Discussions about KPI performance indicators, metrics and data can be intimidating, but at City of Guelph we're trying to make sure that it's not scary. It's not a four letter word. It's something that we should be proud of if we need to focus on things, then we can focus on it. There's no blame and shame. It's all about one city and we support each other when it comes to corporate performance.

Daniel Beamsigne

Our, one of our main focus is building performance measurement into the work processes so we can deploy the right resources and support our staff effectively. As you were mentioned, that's part of the 25 year planning where we can figure out what do we need to do. How do we need to do it, and how do we get there?

Wendy King

It's interesting because we learned through COVID how we can do things different. I don't think many of us would have figured out some of the ways that people have determined that that we can do it and it works, and in some cases we might not go back to the old ways.

Daniel Beamsigne

Yeah, definitely. It's it's been a a major shift and for me personally I joined in the middle of the pandemic, so this has been a huge learning curve and a huge learning experience. I still haven't met some people on my team in person, but I've been able to work effectively with them, helping them with KPIs and measurements and other things just because of the new ways we've learned to work. And it's it's been quite amazing.

Wendy King

It is amazing what's KPI again?

Daniel Beamsigne

Sorry, a KPI is a key performance indicator. I shouldn't use so much lingo.

Wendy King

I know you guys are used to it. You know, I just thought, well, maybe there's somebody else out there that that doesn't know what that means either. So so you mean data driven like in, for instance social media? So numbers on how how you're engaging with that is that one thing?

Daniel Beamsigne

So that could be one thing that could be how we view how our communications are doing, how people in the Community are seeing and hearing about what the City of Guelph is doing. Other things could be things such as how we utilize our budget, how we utilize our staff, how we're progressing against some, some big capital projects, but those those are really more public facing in internally we probably would look at our processes to see if there's things we can improve. How long does it take for us to pick up the phone and someone calls? Or how? How often do they have to come back to us for a for a specific task? So these kind of things can all be measured. And it's it's just a matter of setting it up so that you can use it effectively when you're making these decisions.

Wendy King

Oh, I think people would be thrilled to know that you're monitoring that kind of thing. That's that's amazing. I wish other places would do that as well, so we have something that we call the rapid fire, but you don't have to be that rapid about it. But let me just pose you, uh, three questions. Uhm, what impact do you think that all the initiatives that you both have mentioned have on the city budget?

Jody Sales

So I think our goal is that the performance measures and the understanding we have of how we're getting towards our goals becomes part of what informs budget investments. So if we know that there's somewhere that needs a bit more of an investment to get to green, we want to be able to present that information to Council. Or if we know that there's something that's going really well and a little bit more of an investment can tip it over the top will be able to use the data and the insights that we have from our strategic plan performance reporting to be able to highlight some opportunities for the organization.

Wendy King

And Daniel?

Daniel Beamsigne

Yeah, just just as Jody said. Reporting really becomes an input to budget and once you have your budget, that's kind of your planning stage. It's kind of your planning stage, so you first you plan, you budget, you report back and you adjust and you continue that cycle.

Wendy King

Right, that makes sense. And how do each of your initiatives benefit the Community would just say?

Daniel Beamsigne

So definitely this is an increase in transparency. We hope to that this trans translates to increase trust in local government. Uh, the community. The community will be able to see how their tax dollars are being used. They'll be able to see what the organization and what counsel views as priorities and they can have their say on that as they delegate and come to Council. And they can also see how we're moving the needle forward on each of the projects and initiatives that are identified in the strategic plan and through the Progress report website. So they'll be able to hold us accountable when we don't meet the expectations that we set for ourselves.

Wendy King

And Jody?

Jody Sales

I mean I think Daniel got it perfectly for our council, this is transparency to them and then from them to the public and in public sector, nothing is more important than being transparent and accountable about where dollars are being spent and what they're achieving. So this is a great leap forward for us.

Wendy King

I think it's amazing 2 for people who you know everybody has kind of their special interest group that they're kind of watching. I'm sure like they want. Maybe somebody is really interested in your transit plans or or you know your trail plan so, you can almost compartmentalize it in a way.

Jody Sales

Absolutely, and then I always think there's the 90% that are busy chasing their kids around and don't have time to engage with their local government. And so this is a really wonderful snapshot. If somebody wants to pop in and better understand you know what's the city up to. This is a great place to see what our priorities are. See how we're achieving them and and understand what our focus areas are.

Wendy King

I remember when we started, the podcast was new and another way to get the the message out right? So that that was the different way. And then I believe you were having. Well, I would get all the live the live streaming and all that. That probably wasn't new but but got more people engaged. I'm assuming

Jody Sales

For sure, and all of these things, including social media and all of the other communications tactics we've talked about, are part of our communications master plan that is just being finalized now. It will have some really measurable deliverables and then ultimately will be able to understand. Does the podcast audience you know, are they getting really good value out of the time that we're all investing in making it? And is it increasing their understanding of local government? And our goals here at the city and all of those things. So I think I think everything is being done with purpose and and that's a really productive feeling for folks who work on these things all day

Wendy King

For sure. And what one word would you use to describe why the city wants to move forward with these initiatives?

Daniel Beamsigne

So I mean, we've said it a lot, but I think "progress" is the word that we use. This is a way for us to get better and to move forward. As an organization, we want to be future ready. That's what we've called our strategic plan and and this this will help us get there for sure.

Wendy King

Jody, do you have a special word?

Jody Sales

Maybe it's "ambitious", uh, this kind of transparency and just uncomfortable exposure of how it's going and what we want to achieve is ambitious for us and for all local governments, I think, but we hope that we can be a trendsetter in in being bold and being brave and and being really transparent.

Wendy King

That's amazing, I think transparency for. I mean from everything we see in the world isn't that that is a huge word right now and and will be going forward. So for sure. Well, my thanks to to Jody and Daniel for some really great information. It's obvious there is tremendous teamwork going on across all of your department, so thank you so much for all your hard work.

Daniel Beamsigne

Thank you Wendy.

Jody Sales

Thanks so much.

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Daniel Beamsigne

I'm Wendy King, with the City of Guelph, Big G In Conversation podcasts. Thanks for joining me. If you have ideas for a show or comments you can email biggpodcasts@guelph.ca. Until next time, take care and let's keep the conversation going.