

**City of Bisbee  
Action Plan (February 2017)**

**Ohren's Note:** in the discussion of the financial challenges facing the city, a related theme emerged. The obligations to the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS) are part of the financial challenge and require an annual general fund commitment that means fewer resources to provide the other services sought by residents. Related to that is the extensive commitment to supporting fire service operations at current levels, which most participants considered unsustainable.

**Goal One                      Ensure City Financial Sustainability  
Action Strategies**

***Highest Priority***

1. Collect unpaid bills owed to the city (11)

As noted in the discussion this is a sizeable amount and might require using a collection agency, which itself can require resources.

2. Host a community conversation about the financial crisis facing the city, including what were perceived as unsustainable operations in the fire service (9)

Strategies two and three here are obviously related; staff will need to identify options for dealing with financing and structuring fire service operations and share that with the community. But, first and foremost, residents must understand the financial crisis facing the city. As noted below under Goal Two, this conversation might also include attention to broader economic development themes, which provide some financial relief over the long term. In my view, and I suspect most everybody in the room felt the same way, this conversation is absolutely essential to ensuring long-term sustainability. And, it probably will require several months of preparation, especially in view of the need to devote staff and council time to the budget process from March through June.

3. Develop creative options for addressing the financial challenges posed by current fire service operations (7)

4. Complete a detailed cost analysis of all fee based services and adjust fee levels appropriately (5)

Cities levy fees, or user charges as they are sometimes called, to cover the cost of services that are specific to an individual as opposed to the general public (the latter services are more typically covered by general taxes). The cost of delivering services obviously changes over time and hence most communities update their fee schedules on a regular basis. Related to this discussion at the meeting was the necessity of developing policies related to fee assessment; an "event policy" was the example used, but such policies should cover not only the cost of services provided but describe the mechanism by which payment is made and the deadlines required. Strategy six below related to a specific example of policy that includes several departments.

***Priority When Resources Permit***

5. Consider annexing land outside the city to broaden the tax base

6. Develop standard operating procedures to insure that fees are assessed when services are provided across departments.

The example in the discussion was the sewer tap-in fee, which is provided for by ordinance but requires coordination between public works and the finance departments.

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**Ohren's Note:** in the discussion of this challenge two related themes emerged. The first acknowledge our heavy reliance on tourism as an economic driver, and thus the action strategies are designed to build on tourism but also to identify and expand the economy based on other drivers. The second theme related to the concerns expressed about the local school district; the district has struggled, lost students, lost funding, and potentially becomes a challenge in attracting young professionals and entrepreneurs.

**Goal Two                      Diversify the Bisbee Economy  
Action Strategies**

***Highest Priority***

1. Identify and implement creative opportunities for overnight stays (10)

Given that city funding relies so heavily on the local sales tax, the point here was to attract visitors and to keep them in town overnight.

2. Pursue business ready attention by adopting best practices for development (9)

There is a significant literature on the best practices that have been identified for facilitating business investment. If I understood correctly, Arizona does not have a statewide program certifying business ready communities, as Michigan does, but the city can identify those best practices deemed applicable and seek to put them in place.

3. Strengthen linkage with Mexican communities to take advantage of commerce and trade that might come with port of entry designation (6)
4. Develop a target market analysis to identify markets and investment that we might recruit (5)

***Priority When Resources Permit***

1. Continue promoting the city through a variety of media
2. Redesign and improve the gateway to the city
3. Identify and pursue appropriate place-making strategies

As I noted above with respect to business ready communities there is a sizable literature on place-making strategies designed to help cities appeal to a younger demographic. While this was not deemed a high priority it might be a useful project for an intern or a volunteer to assemble some of that material for a council work session.

4. Embrace and promote our role as a retirement community
5. Explore greater state support for economic development efforts perhaps through the Governor's Mega Regions program
6. Engage the community in a broad discussion

The discussion suggested the value of getting the community on board in understanding the challenges facing the city. It might be done in conjunction with the community conversation on the city's financial crisis, deemed a highest priority in Goal One, as I have suggested.

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**Goal Three                      Recruit and Attract Young Entrepreneurs and Families to Bisbee  
Action Strategies**

***Highest Priority***

1. Target young entrepreneurs and young families on the city website and provide supporting materials to recruit this demographic (12)

These first two strategies are obviously connected, and even the third can offer insight in the targeting efforts reflected in one and two. The point was to reach out to a demographic group that can bring economic investment and young families that are viewed as important to community sustainability. Reaching out to those young entrepreneurs who have already made Bisbee a home can also provide insight into why some come and stay and what strategies and information might be used in promoting the community.

2. Identify specific target markets for outreach efforts to this demographic (12)
3. Engage current residents from this demographic to develop a better understanding of their needs and expectations in terms of city services and amenities (4)

A consultant may be hired to facilitate a focus group of such participants, but even less formal approaches for gathering information might be helpful.

***Priority When Resources Permit***

4. Explore potential partners--Cochise College, local businesses, nonprofits--for possible support in establishing a technology incubator to attract small business or technology companies
5. Continue to partner with "proyouthquest" to introduce young people to working for the city as a possible career option, and to help young people understand the challenges of operating a city

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**Ohren's Note:** while participants were aware of the financial challenges facing the city, they were also aware of the sacrifices that city employees have made over the past several years as budgets have tightened. The number of employees has declined, salary levels have stagnated, most employees are doing more for the same wages, and job descriptions have not kept up with the duties now being performed by many employees. This too is unsustainable, but the worry was that raising expectations for significant change in the short run may not be wise. The point here in the discussion was to demonstrate commitments to employees over the long term, while taking modest steps in the short term to improve working conditions. Participants wanted to go on record as being aware of the conditions that employees face and commit to address those conditions as the financial challenges ease up.

**Goal Four                      Attract, Develop and Retain Employees  
Action Strategies**

***Highest Priority***

1. Conduct a job classification study and a comparative compensation survey to gain a better understanding of the relative position of our employees vis-à-vis other public employee (12)

These might become regular processes, perhaps every three or four years, to remain current, and the League of Arizona Cities and Towns may provide support or data for such analyses.

2. Improve working conditions for employees to the extent resources permit; clean facilities, professional leadership, recognition as appropriate (11)

3. Sponsor an annual employee appreciation day to demonstrate support for employees (5)

The number here does not reflect the level of sentiment in support of this strategy, especially since council members appeared to all agree that they would pick up the cost for the celebration.

***Priority When Resources Permit***

4. Develop an equipment replacement plan to insure up to date and safe equipment for employees
5. Provide necessary resources to the extent possible to support employee development and training opportunities