



Organizational Assessment
~Preliminary Draft~

City of Algona

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Prepared by:

Paul Koch
Paul Koch Consulting, Inc.
pkconsulting17@hotmail.co

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Process.....	1
Major Issues	1
Recommendations	3
Consultant’s Comments	4
Appendix.....	6-8
Action Plan	
Citizen Survey	
Elected and Appointed Officials Survey	

Introduction

Following the most recent election, Algona's leadership changed bringing about new approaches to governance and the delivery of local services. This report is the result of a decision by the mayor and City Council to analyze the current operation of Algona's city government and to provide improvement suggestions based upon feedback from community members, elected and appointed officials, and the experience of this consultant. This analysis and the implementation of the suggestions herein, should lead to improved city management and decision making.

The Process

The assessment process included two different interview questionnaires completed by elected and appointed officials, staff, and selected citizens. Interviews were conducted in Algona over three days in February 2005. All interviews were confidential and participants were guaranteed anonymity. In all, twenty-five individuals were interviewed. Almost every participant made mention of issues or concerns leading to additional questions not reflected on the original survey. Copies of the surveys are included in the Appendix.

In addition, a large volume of data was also reviewed. These documents included copies of the Algona 2004 Zoning Code Update, the 2004 and 2005 budgets, newspaper articles, and portions of certain City Council minutes.

It is anticipated the mayor and City Council will review this report and then work together with citizens and staff to correct any deficiencies.

Major Issues

The survey process allowed identification of the following major issues challenging both elected officials and professional staff:

1. Algona's historic practices and communication systems are being overturned without a smooth transition. The change in Algona's leadership was abrupt. Long-term leaders were quickly replaced by new leaders who have totally different views and approaches. This massive change, without necessary two-way communication and engagement, has created a culture of divisiveness. Many staff members view responses

from the mayor and city council members as “disrespect.” This attitude fuels further fear and forces a “picking of sides.” Leaders need to focus on the human elements in such changes to enhance their effectiveness.

2. Algona lacks a collaborative city vision and assessment process. The mayor and some city council members have ideas about Algona’s future, but staff and community members have not bought into the ideas because they were not a part of the visioning process. Without a clear, collaborative vision and outlined policy expectations, this organization has splintered into different groups which need to be reunited and to work together to achieve progress. When leaders engage people in the process and create consensus people usually support change. An effective collaborative process involving the mayor, city council members, and city staff can go a long way toward changing the current climate.
3. Algona lacks effective communication between city leadership and staff. The recent community election created a huge change in leadership policy and direction. Actions were taken without adequate collaboration, cooperation and understanding. This lack of communication led to confusion, and, in some instances, fear. When people are not involved in or advised of change, they usually personalize issues and revert to unconstructive communication. While there is no “right or wrong” in many of the local government’s approaches, when such massive change occurs, it is easy for humans to fall into conflict and confrontation. Some groups support change and the City’s current direction, others, out of fear and confusion, are still trying to relate to the historic patterns. In addition, some staff members do not know how to communicate or to get resolution to issues using normal channels. This situation is compounded by some leaders’ lack of adequate attention to communication, inclusion and engagement.
4. City staff believes leaders are not listening. The survey effort indicates the mayor and some city council members have strong personalities and very strong opinions. Although this can be a good trait, it is also very negative when vision and communication are not present. The concepts of leader as servant and extra effort at listening are needed.
5. City staff members lack clear structure and outlined expectations. This issue relates to the interface between the strong mayor and the staff expected to implement changes. Most city staff members are unsure of the City’s direction and what role they are expected to take in change.

This confusion, although related to vision and communication should be viewed separately. At this time, staff roles and expectations are clouded and individuals are unsure of their future. Present city staff members represent an excellent resource for the community. Their individual skills and talents should be assessed and more effectively utilized.

6. Some employees may not be willing or able to adapt to the new expectations. People respond to change differently; some are energized by it, others fear it. Individuals who are not successfully able to handle change should be encouraged to and assisted in moving to a position elsewhere. The transition should be handled positively with everyone focusing on its benefits.

Recommendations

Quick and effective solutions to the identified issues are possible, given the mayor and City Council's commitment and the quality of the city staff. Algona has a strong sense of community shared by almost everyone. The mayor, city council and staff members, past city leaders, and community members are all committed to enhancing life quality and value. There is no question about Algona continuing to exist as a community. Most Algona citizens are satisfied with city services. To effectively deal with the issues being faced by the Algona organization and community, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Create a formal Mayor's Cabinet. The mayor should formally and officially create a staff level cabinet made up of department heads with one department head selected as a "Chief of Staff." The mayor and cabinet members will work in partnership and operate with open, honest and professional dialogue to implement the mayor and city council's programs.
2. Embark immediately on a mayor, City Council, and management staff strategic planning process to:
 - a. Create a collaborative twenty-year vision statement identifying what Algona looks like, how it works, and how people relate to each other now and in the future.
 - b. Determine, in priority order, what must be done to achieve the vision (strategic initiatives).

- c. Given the vision and strategic initiatives, identify, in specific terms, the expectations for the mayor, city council members, staff members, governing boards, and the community.
 - d. Create specific action plans for each prioritized strategic initiative. A sample action plan is included in the Appendix.
 - e. Hold the strategic plan in “draft status” and conduct two or three community meetings to share and reshape your work.
 - f. Following the community meetings, have city council formally adopt the plan and direct staff to utilize the plan in preparation of the 2006 budget.
 - g. Have staff members assist the mayor and city council in developing a set of “Council Operating Courtesies” to guide the interactions and work of council members. Utilize these “courtesies” to ensure active listening and open communication.
3. Ensure the “plan” and “courtesies” are reviewed and discussed at each city council meeting.
 4. Engage and involve members of the city council and community as new programs, changes and services are developed. Bringing people into the process early, engaging them in discussions, and setting the stage for “buy-in” will go a long way in reducing current tensions.

CONSULTANT’S COMMENTS

Without minimizing your concerns about Algona, be aware there are other Northwest communities which have much more serious issues. Your leadership and staff have the potential for wonderful community building. Coming together within the context of a common vision may be a challenge, but the payoff will be huge.

While in Algona, I met people who want to know where their community is going and who desire a clear understanding of their role in getting there. The community members I interviewed, even those who were aligned with past leadership, indicated a desire to work with the new leadership to move

the community forward. Algona sits at a crossroads, facing huge opportunity and real challenges.

While it is easy to focus on “saving money” and making other organizational changes, when changes are not made in the context of working together and with open communication, less than desired results are often produced. The mayor and city council members have strong opinions and feelings about what is best for Algona. With improved communication and engagement with staff and community members, it is possible to capitalize on the ideas and commitment of the new leadership. Staff members need to embrace new leadership and provide professional leadership required to make the changes reflected by the outcome of the last election.

It is imperative city hall management move away from fear and confusion and move toward assisting the mayor and City Council to create vision and priorities for Algona’s future. Cynthia Stewart of Northwest Small Cities could facilitate improved communication and positive energy among leadership and staff. When lack of sufficient funds, staff reductions and service consolidation are considered, it is difficult for staff. Algona is missing the vision context which will help make those efforts community builders. There must be change in Algona, and that change must result from collaboration among the mayor, city council, and staff members. The creation of a Chief of Staff and a Mayor’s Cabinet is the first step towards changing conflict into unification. Once these working relationships improve, past leaders’ and the community’s feedback and suggestions can be incorporated into future planning. Including all of these entities will create a more unified community.

And finally, as you work and grow together, please remember to:

- collaborate to achieve Algona’s vision,
- communicate with one another, and
- listen to and honor the opinions of everyone.

Action Plan

What do we want to accomplish?

How does this goal relate to our vision?

How will we accomplish our goal?

Who will help us achieve our goal?

What is the timeline for achieving our goal?

How will we pay expenses related to achieving our goal?

How will we measure success?

**Confidential
Citizens' Survey**

Purpose: To identify, assess and educate the City about specific concerns and potential solutions. This process will lead to enhanced community services delivery.

1. What is going on? Is there good communication?
2. What are the major issues facing the City organization?
3. What are the major issues facing the community?
4. What is your vision for the community?
5. What changes do you think need to be made in City operations?
6. What do citizens tell you need to be improved?
7. How are things working?
8. Is the City's vision clear?
9. What are the priorities?
10. What could be improved? Where could the mayor improve?
11. Open comments:

Confidential
Elected and Appointed Officials Survey

Purpose: To identify, assess and educate the City about specific concerns and potential solutions. This process will lead to enhanced community services delivery.

1. Why did you run for City Council/Board of Commission?
2. What did you promise folks that you would do?
 - a. How are you doing on them?
3. What are the major issues facing the community?
4. What are the major issues facing staff?
5. What changes do you think need to be made in city operations?
6. What do citizens tell you need to be improved?
7. How are things working?
8. What could be improved? Where could the mayor improve?
9. Open comments:
 - a. What is the city's vision?
 - b. What are the city's priorities?
 - c. What are your expectations for the mayor, city council members, staff, etc.?