

M E M O



**County
Administrator**

Robert W. Wilson
701-241-5770
wilsonro@casscountynd.gov

TO: County Commissioners
FROM: Robert W. Wilson
DATE: October 14, 2020
SUBJECT: Accountability Team Report

As part of the strategic plan adopted last year, an Accountability Team was appointed and tasked with providing feedback on the County's efforts to implement plan goals. Accountability Team members include Blair Hodge, Jason Benson, Amanda Johnson, Cindy Risk, Levon Kohoutek and Commissioner Duane Breitling.

The team met on September 24th and reviewed progress made to date on implementation of the plan's goals. For your review I have included the briefing memo I prepared for the team prior to the meeting on the 24th and meeting note from that conversation.

At the meeting on October 19th I will brief the Board on feedback from the Team. I have also invited members of the Accountability Team to address the Commission if they wish to do so. I look forward to discussing our progress to date and opportunities to continue implementing plan goals.

PO Box 2806
211 Ninth Street South
Fargo, North Dakota 58108

www.casscountynd.gov

MEMO



County Administrator

Robert W. Wilson
701-241-5770
wilsonro@casscountynd.gov

TO: Accountability Team
FROM: Robert W. Wilson
DATE: September 22, 2020
SUBJECT: September 24th Agenda Memo - Progress Update

Thank you for your continued willingness to serve on the Accountability Team. This memo is intended to provide you with information prior to the meeting on the 24th so you may more critically question and evaluate the organization-wide progress towards achieving the strategic planning goals. The attached agenda mirrors the Strategic Priorities described in the Plan:

- I. **County Workforce** – Many elements of this priority relate to Human Resources. Organization-wide, we realized we don't have appropriate staffing to fulfill the core office functions and take on the tasks described in the Strategic Plan. The Commission responded by authorizing a Payroll Clerk position, freeing the HR Director to work on higher level activities, including many of the described Plan activities.

The County is also reviewing proposals for new financial and accounting software that, among other things, tracks and manages HR data we don't currently have the ability to track.

County departments also have access to a variety of training programs, including leadership development courses. Employees are encouraged to work with their supervisors if they have an interest in training opportunities.

- II. **Operational Excellence** – One of the key strategic goals of this priority was 'streamlining internal communications.' In March the County hired Mr. Catlin Solum as Communications Coordinator. Mr. Solum has been a great addition to the County and made an immediate impact. This is an area where I am particularly interested in feedback. Have employees seen a difference in the level of communication and information from County leaders? How can we continue to do a better job?

Financial convenience for citizens (tax statements in PDF format and available for download) is another goal within this strategic priority. As indicated, the county is working with vendors on a financial platform upgrade.

- III. **Outreach & Engagement** – The Communications Coordinator position is referenced above. Mr. Solum was hired the day State of ND declared a COVID 19 emergency. Catlin has assisted with public information, assisted with voting related information, has met with department heads about information they would like to share. In 2021 the County will consider a new vendor or refresh of the website. Mr. Solum will be involved with that effort.

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- IV. Embracing Growth** – The guiding principles of this strategic priority include, ‘being prepared, to the greatest extent possible, for eventualities’ & ‘identify new approaches and apply best practices to manage employee growth and address workforce issues.’

County Commitment to participate in funding for Cass County Career Workforce Academy. 5 mills over 5 years is a significant commitment to the future workforce of Cass County and the economic vitality of the county.

V. Other Concerns/Opportunities for Improvement

The Strategic Plan focuses primarily on internal operations. A significant internal focus during this budgeting cycle has been the implementation of a new pay matrix for 2021. This was not part of the Strategic Plan but was a major part of the discussions during that process.

The timeline of Accountability Team meetings & other Strategic Planning activities has been impacted by COVID-19. At our last meeting there were great discussions about all- county seminars or learning sessions. As the Human Resources Office has more time for long-term planning, we will continue to look for ways to engage even if the size of the gatherings is restricted.

VI. Commission/Department Head Schedule of Future Meetings

The Department Head group will meet next on September 30th. I will look for department updates and future planning goals. Feedback from this meeting will be provided to Department Heads.

I will also present a report from this team at an upcoming Commission meeting. That will likely occur at the October 5th meeting. Additional representation from this group would be much appreciated.

Cass County Accountability Team
Meeting Notes
September 24, 2020

Attendees: Blair Hodge, Jason Benson, Amanda Johnson, Cindy Risk, Levon Kohoutek, Commissioner Duane Breitling, Robert Wilson

Reminder for the group of what we don't want: "SPOTS" - **Strategic Plan on the Shelf.**

There was a suggestion a comprehensive review of the plan is needed in early 2021. This would be a line by line assessment of which goals have been achieved, which ones are achievable by the end of the three year time period, and which goals are no longer applicable or relevant.

I. County Workforce

There was a suggestion that a county leadership training program be explored and completion of various levels of the program identified for certain position grades (within the pay matrix). A leadership academy/training program was previously discussed in Human Services. There was also a strong desire for a mentorship program for new employees. The overall conversation is that ongoing employee training should be a high priority.

We had a significant discussion that many of the goals within this category represent additional duties for the Human Resources office. The Administrator and Commission recognize the HR Director does not have the time available to devote to additional activities without additional office support. Within the 2021 budget, the Commission included funding for a Payroll Clerk specifically to free more of the HR Director's time to work on higher level Human Resource tasks.

II. Operational Excellence and Outreach & Engagement

The team combined discussion of two strategic goals – largely about different elements of communications.

Feedback from the team was that they appreciate the work of the Communications Coordinator but would like to see more internally focused messages. Particularly within the bigger departments there was a strong desire for more general information about internal activities. For example, discussions of what various departments done in response to COVID would be of interest. Specifically, how other departments have worked remotely, managed workflows, and maintained employee connectedness were mentioned as potential topics.

Another example was potentially sharing a particularly challenging situation in one department where additional staff hours and schedule coordination was needed to meet the needs of a client. Employees have worked hard and filled the needed shifts. Spotlighting some of the extra efforts required as a response to COVID would be appreciated. One last example – are there creative ways some departments are utilizing the \$30 per employee allotment?

There was also a specific comment commending Information Technology on their work to allow and facilitate remote working opportunities for County employees.

III. Embracing Growth

Specifically related to goal 4a, there was a suggestion for an 'off-budget cycle' meeting with other local jurisdictions to assess if there are emerging needs that should be built into an upcoming budget.

IV. Other Concerns/Opportunities for Improvement

There was a comment that it felt like employee concerns expressed during the strategic planning process have been taken seriously and steps to address those concerns are occurring. The Commission's action on the pay matrix was one positive example cited.

V. Commission/Department Head Schedule of Future Meetings

It was discussed that I would share this information at the Department Head meeting on the 30th and at an upcoming Commission meeting – likely October 19th. Members of this team were invited to participate in the Commission discussion on the 19th.