

WHY A STRATEGIC PLAN?

**A REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANNING
IN
SELECTED ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES**

MPA Research Report

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INTRODUCTION

As we approach the new millenium, municipal government in Ontario is experiencing major changes. The Province has ceased regular transfer payment to municipalities, has downloaded the delivery of many services which traditionally were provided by the Province and paid for by the Province, and has embarked on a program to encourage municipalities to amalgamate and restructure in an attempt to streamline service provision and enhance efficiency. All of this has been done in a short period of time. Some would articulate that "chaos reigns". Others would be encouraged by the optimism of municipal governments and municipal professionals as they rise to the challenge. Clearly the time has passed when municipal governments could afford the luxury of diversity of direction. It is time to concentrate efforts on the primary wishes and needs of the electorate. To achieve this it is necessary to have in place a strategic plan which has the endorsement of Council, staff and the community.

An investigation into strategic planning and management in municipalities could provide insight into how municipalities are adapting to the added challenges of the 90's, and setting the stage for success in the new millenium. This paper will attempt to find whether or not strategic planning exercises are assisting Councils and staff in Ontario's municipalities to address the major changes they are facing.

Having worked in a senior position in municipal government for many years, working closely with Councils, a strategic plan would appear to be a solution to many of

the problems associated with priority setting and managing in the municipal sector. It seems logical, that a Council, elected by constituents of a geographic area, would be expected to seriously consider what types and levels of services their constituents would prefer, and what type of costing would be associated with those services, and then set priorities for implementation and delivery of those services. However, today's electorate might expect their elected representatives to take a more proactive approach to governance and attempt to determine what type of municipality would best suit the needs of the populace in the long term - provide a vision for the future - and then put in place a strategy to achieve that future vision.

If this approach was followed by municipal Councils, a strategic plan, once in place, would determine how scarce financial and human resources would best be utilized to achieve the desired vision. Given the financial crunch currently facing Ontario municipalities, it would seem that strategic planning followed by strategic management practices would be a definite asset to municipal governments.

In line with the above, perhaps Councils should undertake strategic planning sessions with community leaders very soon after being elected. This would allow for a full three year term to put in place an action plan to implement any strategy decided upon. This overall strategic plan would provide direction for staff (who should have been involved in the determination of the overall plan along with Council) to follow with internal strategic plans, so that all decisions made within functional Departments would be in line with the overall plan. Thus, if the external plan indicated that economic development was a primary thrust, then resources would be directed to achieve that end,

with lesser emphasis on roads and recreation. The strategic plan would then be seen to drive any long range planning and budgeting.

To extend this thinking further, it would seem appropriate that the plan have some flexibility so that if factors outside of the control of the municipality changed, the plan could adapt. In order for this to occur smoothly, political leadership and a clearly defined communication program would be imperative.

Before proceeding further to review strategic planning and management in municipalities it is important to note that there are many types of strategic plans utilized by municipalities. In a perfect world the process, above, would have been utilized. However, often the pressure from a specific group could provide the impetus for a specific type of strategic plan. If the above process was utilized, the plan driven by the Council and community leaders might be called a "Community Strategic Plan" the one undertaken by the administration to assist implementation might be called a "Corporate Strategic Plan", and a specific plan to be used for a functional purpose such a economic development, might be called "A Strategic Plan for Economic Development". Once again, in a perfect world these would relate, with the overall plan (Community Plan) providing the direction for the others. These three categories will be referred to throughout this paper.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate in selected Ontario municipalities whether or not strategic planning is being done, and if it is, how successful is it. The lower tier municipalities in Ottawa-Carleton will be reviewed, and the City of Burlington's plans, commended in 1988 and 1991 by the Province as an example of success in strategic planning for Ontario municipalities, will be reviewed in depth. The

research will focus primarily on the outcome of the plan rather than the process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic planning has been part of private sector management for many years and much has been written about it. For the purpose of this research paper, the author concentrated on literature that dealt with public sector strategic planning and management. John Bryson's **Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations** was extremely helpful in laying out the basics with respect to the process of strategic planning in the public sector. As well this author provided valuable insights into what strategic planning isn't as detailed later in this paper. **Planning Strategies that Work**, (Noel M. Tichy and David O Ulrich) helped this writer to define leadership and recognize its importance to municipal sector strategic planning. Jack Koteen in **Strategic Management in Public and Nonprofit Organizations** notes that strategic management seeks to provide strategic direction, guide priority use of resources, set standards of excellence, cope with change and uncertainty and provide objective basis for control and evaluation. Strategic management asks and answers the key questions facing an organization in an orderly way with a sense of priority and urgency. He goes on to provide a checklist of 12 questions that a municipality would pose in a strategic planning exercise. The Bryson and Koteen texts provide excellent direction to any municipality wishing to pursue strategic planning. The author also reviewed articles in "Municipal World" written by Tripp Kennedy, that focused on the "why" of strategic planning and the feature by W. Michael Fenn **Future focus: Burlington's strategic planning success** in Canadian Public Administration which details Burlington's early endeavours, and discusses strategic

planning at the municipal level.. Of assistance as well was Strategic Management for Municipalities published by the Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario as part of their Management Series of the Municipal Administration Program, which publishes a useful checklist for municipalities who wish to undertake a plan.. The writings of Todd Swanstrom The Limits of Strategic Planning for Cities which point out that strategic planning in municipalities often biases the planning agenda in favour of economic growth over other goals, such as redistribution of wealth or democratic participation. Certainly in the plans reviewed by this writer the economic component was an issue indicated in most of them. He points out that strategic planning focuses on the effects of policies and is not concerned with the process of decision making; the values of democratic participation and the checks and balances lie outside of the techniques of strategic planning. He concludes that strategic planning is not wrong--simply incomplete with only a limited place in democratic decision making. Chapter 5 of Henry Mintzberg Fundamental Fallacies of Strategic Planning. The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning was illuminating and provided "sober second thought" to the whole business of whether or not municipalities should be engaged in this activity.

The writer reviewed strategic plans for all municipalities investigated as well as from many other Ontario municipalities.

SO, WHAT IS STRATEGIC PLANNING?

Below are four slightly different definitions of "Strategic Planning" all relating to municipal government:

Strategic planning is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions

and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and why it does it. Strategic planning requires broadscale information gathering, an exploration of alternatives, and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. It can facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, and foster orderly decision making and successful implementation" (Bryson, John, Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations, 1988)

Strategic Planning helps ensure that the quantity, quality, and mix of services that are provided are in accord with community needs and preferences and are delivered at prices (tax rates) the community views as appropriate. In other words, strategic planning makes it possible for politicians to do the job they sought to do when they ran for office and that the voters chose them to do; it puts elected representatives in control. (Kennedy, Trip, Why Plan Strategically?, Municipal World, Jan 1991)

Strategic Planning is a proven and effective way to govern complex organizations, like municipalities. (Kennedy, Trip Why Plan Strategically? Municipal World, Jan 1991)

Strategic Planning, defined simplistically, is deciding where you want to go and how you are going to get there. In a municipality this involves preparation of a flexible document that has addressed community needs and interests in developing the resulting course of action. (Herchmer, Brenda, Community Strategic Planning - Grassroots Innovation, Municipal World, Feb. 1992)

WHAT STRATEGIC PLANNING ISN'T

To help clarify further it is important to define as well, what strategic planning isn't. Since this paper will deal with municipal government, it is important to differentiate between strategic planning and the other types of planning normally undertaken by municipalities. John Bryson and Robert Einsweiler in their Introduction to "Strategic Planning - Threats and Opportunities for Planners" provide a clear description of what strategic planning isn't. The following explanation is an excerpt from their Introduction and is provided to assist in clarification of this unique planning technique..

"While strategic and long-range planning are often treated as synonyms, they are not. While the outcomes may be similar in these two types of planning, in practice they differ in four distinctive ways.

First, both focus on an organization and what it should do to improve its performance, but strategic planning relies more on the identification of *issues*, while long-range planning focuses more on the specification of goals and objectives and their translation into current budgets and work programs. Strategic planning is more suitable for politicized circumstances, since identifying and resolving issues does not presume an all-encompassing consensus on organizational purposes and actions. However, the specification of goals and objectives and related budgets and work programs does presume such consensus.

Secondly, strategic planning emphasizes assessment of the organization's internal and external environments far more than long-range planning does. Long-range planners tend to assume that current trends will continue, while strategic planners expect new trends, discontinuities, and a variety of surprises. Thus strategic plans are more likely to embody qualitative shifts in direction and to include a broader range of contingency plans.

Thirdly, strategic planners are more likely than long range planners to summon forth an idealized version of the organization - a vision of success - and ask how it might be achieved. The vision of success typically includes the future organization, its environment, and the way the organization will operate in that environment. Further, the vision often encompasses the strategies by which the organization will change its environment. Because they are guided by a vision of success, strategic plans often represent qualitative shifts in direction, while long-range plans typically are linear extrapolations of the present. These linear extrapolations often are embodied in goal statements that represent projections of existing trends, rather than qualitative shifts in direction.

And fourthly, strategic plans are much more action oriented. Strategic planners usually consider a range of possible futures and focus on the implications in relation to that range - of present decisions and actions. Long-range planners tend to assume a most likely future and then work backward to map out a sequence of decisions and actions necessary to reach the assumed future. Long range planners and plans therefore are more oriented to present decisions and actions and are less prepared to handle contingencies."

When comparing strategic vs comprehensive planning, Bryson & Einsweiler note "There may be little difference in outcomes between strategic planning and the best comprehensive planning for communities--if the agency doing the comprehensive planning is tied directly to key governmental decision makers. However, these can be quite different. Urban comprehensive planning (often called long-range community or master planning) typically is focused on a preferred future situation, which is often based on a

narrow set of environmental trends such as population, employment, land use, and traffic forecasts. It gives credence to the preferences of those involved in the process who rely on the advice of professional experts who determine how the system currently functions and how it can be expected to function in the future given the current situation.

A comprehensive plan will outline how to get from the present to the desired end state, but the action and actors necessary to achieve the end state are rarely named. In contrast, the most common focus of strategic planning in the public sector is on decisions that must be made about issues confronting organizations. The issues emerge from forces and trends in both the external and internal environments (and interactions of the two) and are shaped by the value preferences of various organizational decision makers, including the strategic planners. Strategic plans are then prepared that outline specific strategies to be pursued by specific actors within specific time frames. Thus, traditional urban comprehensive planning often has as much of a vision component as strategic planning, while strategic planning has more emphasis on actors and their actions, organizational changes required to achieve preferred actions, the internal environment, and a broader range of external environmental changes. In strategic planning, the view of the outside is not limited to a relatively standard lists of forecasts. As well comprehensive planning usually confines its agenda to a few of the government's existing roles. For that reason it is of less use to key decision makers than strategic planning, which embraces all of government's actual and potential roles before deciding where, how, and why to act."

According to Bryson and Einsweiler, strategic planning is being used by key governmental decision makers precisely because drastic changes in the public sector are forcing them to think strategically about what government ought to be doing. In other words, decision makers are asking themselves "what businesses should we be in"? Strategic planning requires a more comprehensive view of what may be important than that which normally guides municipal planners and produces a more selective action focus.

Michael Fenn in his article for Canadian Public Administration about the initial Burlington strategic plan notes that "strategic planning is probably best explained in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is. He goes on to explain clearly that strategic planning is not a technical exercise brought about by reports from planners with a restricted role for Council to simply endorse or otherwise dispose of the recommendations produced by staff, but it is "unapologetically a political exercise with the leaders of the community developing a vision of the future they want to achieve, following which the technical and professional challenge is to develop means for reaching that future". In simple terms, where traditional planning is a "bottom-up" technical exercise, strategic planning is a "top-down" visionary exercise.

Before undertaking a research project on strategic planning and management in Ontario municipalities, I felt that it was useful to be completely clear, in my own mind, just

what strategic planning is. The foregoing information assisted me in that task, and hopefully will enlighten the reader as we continue to investigate this topic. To summarize then — strategic planning relies on the identification of issues, places emphasis on both the internal and external environment, identifies a vision of success and attempts to provide direction on how to achieve it, and is more action oriented than other plans.

RESEARCH METHODS

The major emphasis of the research being undertaken on strategic planning and management is to determine whether or not municipalities in Ontario are using this type of tool in municipal government, and if they are, how successful it is. It will also try to determine what factors contribute to the success of the plan both in its initial stages of being developed and in its implementation. (This will also detail what factors contribute to its failure). It will investigate the impact of changes at the political level and whether or not the plan is being used on a regular basis. It will also look at what circumstance precipitated the need for a strategic plan.

It is the expectation of the writer that information gleaned from this project will assist municipalities who may wish to pursue a strategic planning exercise in the future, as well as assist those who may have a plan that is not satisfying their needs. In order to have some basis for comparison, I felt it was essential to provide a survey to guide discussion. I considered what information was required, who had the information, how best to obtain the information and then how should the information be analyzed to provide the information in the most useful format. The previous paragraph outlines what type of

information is needed. Senior staff, such as Chief Administrative Officers and Corporate Planners, Mayors and other members of Council and perhaps some consultants who have been engaged in assisting municipalities in preparing strategic plans are the most likely candidates to have the information required. To address how best to obtain the information, I decided to use nonprobability sampling. This method is appropriate when precise representation or estimation of the characteristics of the total sample population is not necessary, when the data will be used to inform the investigator rather than to conduct statistical tests of hypotheses, or when the effort is exploratory. Nonprobability sampling is particularly appropriate in this case because the purpose of the investigation is to obtain specific information that is known by only specific members of a community. Within the broad range of nonprobability sampling, theoretical sampling was identified as the best method of obtaining the required information. This type of process is utilized to ensure that the full range of opinions are identified and that information is obtained about the pertinent characteristics of the topic being explored. Effective use of this method depends upon clear formulation of the objectives of the assessment and upon continual review and analysis of information as it is being obtained. With this approach people are included in the sample because of who they are and the information they can provide. The purpose of this approach is to attain a complete understanding of the topic and the range of perspectives, not to make a statement about the statistical representativeness of characteristics or opinions. Theoretical sampling is an open-ended process. Often, using this method, the sample is not established in its entirety at the beginning of the process, but on a continuing basis as the result of previous data gathering and analysis. Thus, if an

interview with a Chief Administrative Officer indicates that more detailed information can be gleaned from a community leader, then an effort would be made to interview that person also. Unstructured or semistructured interviews with the initial sample are used to identify additional interviewees and to determine additional questions to pursue. This process seeks to ensure that persons with the maximum divergence of opinion and or positions are included in the sample and that the important issues or information are identified and pursued. This is often called snowball sampling in which an initial set of respondents are asked to name others who should be interviewed, and then this process is repeated to insure a complete investigation of the issue.

There are three major methods that can be used to obtain information from respondents: face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and mailout of surveys. The writer determined that a comprehensive investigation of strategic planning and management in municipalities would require the use of all three methods. A basic survey was designed to guide discussion, and was mailed out to Chief Administrative Officers of all eleven lower-tier municipalities in the Ottawa-Carleton Region. These were followed by face-to-face interviews, and then follow-up interviews with politicians, community leaders, etc. as required. (Appendix A - Discussion Guide)

Since the City of Burlington is a focus of this project, face to face interviews were conducted with the Chief Administrative Officer, the Mayor and a member of Council. Telephone interviews were undertaken with a previous Mayor, a staff member and a Councillor in her first term.

THE OTTAWA-CARLETON EXPERIENCE

The Ottawa-Carleton Region is made up of one upper tier municipality, Ottawa-Carleton, and eleven lower tier municipalities: Rockcliffe Park (Village 2,000 pop.), Vanier (urban city - 18,000 pop.), Ottawa (urban city 325,000 pop.), Nepean (suburban city 110,000 pop.), Kanata (suburban city 48,000 pop.), Gloucester (suburban city - 105,000 pop.), Cumberland (suburban/rural township - 45,000 pop.), Osgoode (rural township - 16,000 pop.), Rideau (rural township - 14,000 pop.), Goulbourn (suburban/rural township - 20,000 pop.), West Carleton (rural township - 16,000 pop.). As can be seen there is a variety of types and sizes of municipalities representing a diverse population in the region that could be considered reflective of many areas across Ontario. Thus, information gleaned from a survey of these municipalities could be useful to a wide variety of municipalities across Ontario. Each Chief Administrative Officer was sent a copy of the questionnaire, Appendix A, with a letter asking for an opportunity for a face to face interview. The questionnaire was provided for guidance only, with the thrust being to allow open dialogue about the topic. It was known that several of the municipalities had undertaken strategic planning exercises and the author had had an opportunity to review these, in most instances, prior to the interview. Following is a summary of each interview.

GOULBOURN TOWNSHIP

Chief Administrative Officer, Bob Townend Mayor Janet Stavinga, and former Councillor Robert Miller were provided with the survey questionnaire and were interviewed individually.. All three referred the author to the Stittsville Community Development Strategy as the only strategic planning exercise that had ever been

undertaken by the municipality. (Stittsville is an urban (fully serviced) community within the Township with a population of approximately 11,000 with extreme growth pressure). Using the survey questionnaire as a guide they indicated that they felt this was an overall community plan with an emphasis on economic development and related only to the Stittsville community. At the time the plan was directed by Council, it was expected that this one would be the first of four, with other communities and the rural area to be studied separately. To date, only the one has been completed. Growth pressures by developers and the need to have a community vision precipitated the need for a plan. The existing community could expand its urban (serviced) boundaries or remain virtually the size it was. If it was to expand then there could be significant changes to the culture of the community. A strategic plan could determine the desires of the populace. The Mayor indicated that from her perspective no holistic planning was being done, that planning was often driven by the development industry and although development met the high quality criteria that the Township required, the question remained whether or not the community actually preferred growth. Councillor Miller felt that there were contentious issues and a need to determine whether or not change was desired by the residents. The Director of Planning, the Clerk/Economic Development Officer provided staff leadership. Consultants were hired to oversee the project. However, only two members of Council, Councillor Stavinga and Councillor Miller fully supported the idea. Although this plan focused on the community of Stittsville the Mayor (from Stittsville) and the other Stittsville Councillor did not actively support this initiative. However, they did endorse it and the Mayor contributed to the communication strategy by sending out a letter to all households

encouraging them to participate in "The Great Consultation". Attached to his letter was an eight page discussion paper which explained the issues. All three people interviewed indicated that a very comprehensive communications strategy was utilized for this exercise. There was a need to educate the public in order that they were informed enough to participate. A Community Briefing Book was provided to all libraries and contained information on all studies that related to the Stittsville community over a ten year period. Posters were distributed to businesses, advertisements were placed in the newspapers, and facilitators were trained to facilitate small group meetings such as "kitchen table discussions". Residents were encouraged to host meetings or to attend one being held in the community. A sixteen page Draft Community Development Strategy was compiled based on comments from the public at the various meetings which had been held. (A member of the consulting team attended all meetings to act as a "raconteur") and it was mailed to each person who had signed in at any of the meetings. A four page "Highlights" document was mailed to every household with an invitation to attend one of the two community-wide meetings being held to discuss the findings. The final product was presented to Council for their consideration. Although never formally adopted by Council the Strategy became a guiding document and was used by Council in decision making and provided to the Regional Government to assist the process of service expansion and land development. All three interviewees agreed that this was an ambitious consultation process, and while the product was excellent they would have liked greater attendance by the public. Mayor Stavinga, however, felt that those who did attend were representative of the general population of the community. She cautioned that perhaps the reason that the

turnout was not as great as expected was that the exercise was held at a time when many issues were before the public which required attendance at meetings.. As well, the project started late and had to be extended into the New Year with a break for the Christmas holidays which may have impeded the momentum. She felt that better timing might have enhanced participation. Mr. Townend indicated that too much staff time was required for this project, even though a very competent consultant was responsible for the process. The Stittsville process saw wide involvement. Community members and junior staff of the municipality were trained by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs personnel as facilitators. Councillor Stavinga involved the three schools in the community and students expressed their vision of a future Stittsville.

The issues addressed in the Strategy have been used to ensure proper planning for a community that indicated that growth was desirable with specific limits. Amendments to the Official Plan and Zoning By-laws of the community have been undertaken to accommodate the changes indicated. The document is used by the new Council to justify development in those areas identified within the plan, and to refuse development applications that are not appropriate. Mayor Stavinga indicated that endorsement by the new Council has reinforced the plan's validity.

In discussion with all three interviewees as to why an overall plan has never been done for the Township, and why strategic plans for the three other areas have not moved forward, reasons given were that there is a constant shortage of staff time to get involved in these types of time consuming projects and more importantly all agreed that there was no political will. Another indicator seemed to be the evolution of the culture of a Council.

As a Council is forced to deal with complex issues such as development pressures, diversity of lifestyles, etc. a change from a caretaker role to a leadership role is required. This is when processes such as strategic planning are needed. Of particular importance to this review is what factors contribute to the success of a strategic plan. Mayor Stavinga indicated that it must be inclusive of the broad community, as well as Council and staff. She indicated that it should be clear and concise and easily readable by all - avoid jargon at all costs! Mr. Townend felt that it should be driven by the public, not the bureaucrats, and Councillor Miller strongly indicated that success was dependent on leadership and support by Council. Mayor Stavinga re-emphasized this point by saying that a plan must have "visible champions" either/or Council or community members, that it should involve a wide spectrum of the community and requires political leadership. The Stittsville Community Development Strategy has survived a new Council and is now over two years old. It is still a driving force in the future development of the Stittsville community. As such, it is considered a success by the municipality..

RIDEAU TOWNSHIP

Mr. Gary Dillabough, Chief Administrative Officer of Rideau Township was interviewed with respect to Rideau's involvement in strategic planning. Mr. Dillabough indicated that a plan had been done in 1996 by Council, without involvement of the public or any member of staff, including himself. It is entitled "Council Action Plan". He noted that it was a political exercise pushed by one Councillor. Since there was not a requirement for input from those outside of Council, there was no communication plan. Mr. Dillabough responded that the Plan belonged to the previous Council and was not

being used by the existing Council. No action plan was put into place to achieve any goals of the plan, even though the sub-title was "How Can We Most Effectively Preserve and Enhance the Quality of Life in our Community While Fostering a Stronger Economic Base in Rideau?" The Mission Statement - "Our mission is to serve our residents, provide leadership and direction, and ensure a vibrant, participatory, healthy and safe community, now and in the future." Mr. Dillabough expressed that he had advised Council prior to undertaking the Plan that it would be beneficial to involve staff and the general public, however, this did not occur. He indicated that in his opinion for a plan to be successful it should have the full support of Council and adequate staff resources to "do the job right", and that it should involve all clients (public). He felt that a good "strategic plan" could provide appropriate direction for a municipality. Since this plan is not being utilized by the Township and does not have the support of the existing Council, it would not be considered a success.

THE CITY OF VANIER

Mr. Dan Ouimet, Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Vanier reported that this City had produced a strategic plan in 1991, and then again in 1995. The original plan according to Mr. Ouimet was a "dream" with a "wish list" not a "vision", in that those involved did not take into consideration any aspect of how the "vision" could possibly be achieved. Thus, initiatives noted at the time would never be achievable through the regular means of funding (taxes, provincial grants, etc.) Therefore, the plan was never used.

The more recent 1995 plan is a much more realistic document. Mr. Ouimet

emphasized how important it was for a municipality to be realistic in identifying its Mission and goals. He felt the current Mission for Vanier was achievable "The mission of the Corporation of the City of Vanier is to act on behalf of both current and future residents, businesses, workers and visitors to Vanier by fostering and maintaining a high quality of community life through the creative use of available resources". It stated four goals, objectives of the goals and initiatives to be put in place to achieve the goals. The goals encompassed a prosperous economy, a healthy environment, a revitalized community and an effective organization. This plan was put in place without public input. A committee of Council members the CAO and staff co-ordinated the effort. Many internal meetings were conducted and all levels of employees provided input. Mr. Ouimet noted that in this instance the topic - the future of Vanier - was removed from the day to day work environment, therefore, all members of staff felt comfortable contributing to the topic. The Planning Director is the principal staff person involved in managing the plan. Mr. Jim Kearns, Director of Planning, indicated that he felt the process of the plan was worthwhile and important to the organization as a directional tool. He does not review it annually, but does use it when setting budgets each year. There has been no formal updating of the plan It is used as an internal guide for functional programs and activities. The new Council has endorsed the plan as their own. Mr. Ouimet indicated that he felt a successful plan should be inclusive of all staff, realistic in its vision, have an effective system of monitoring and be a neutral exercise. He felt that the single most important aspect of the Vanier plan was that in producing it all members of staff were brought together for a common purpose and shared views. "It went a great distance in improving

staff morale” said Mr. Ouimet. A comment made by Mr. Ouimet on the first plan undertaken by the City was “that politicians while dreaming about things that were not achievable they were not doing things that had to be done with a very detrimental affect on the municipality”. Perhaps the new strategic plan for Vanier will help it achieve the practical results it desires.

THE CITY OF NEPEAN

In 1995 the City of Nepean finalized a corporate management plan. Mr. Bob Letourneau, CAO noted that this was an internal strategic planning exercise with its primary purpose to re-build “Team Nepean”. He pointed out that with rapid staff growth, new staff did not understand the real meaning of this slogan. The plan would attempt to bring all employees into “Team Nepean” and restate the importance of “teams” to the success of the municipality. The thrust of the plan was to achieve responsible community service, to add value to the services already being provided and to streamline operations for efficiency and effectiveness. It was hoped that an across the board “buy-in” would be achieved. The Chief Administrative Officer provided leadership along with senior managers but it took a period of six months to put together the framework to undertake the plan. No Council members were involved in leading the plan or in the planning process. The group used a strong communications strategy using newsletters, staff briefings, appointing specific people to “spread the word” to keep the planning process before all members of staff. Committees were convened to look at various functions, thus, a very large number of employees at all levels were involved. Consultants were hired only when specific training sessions were needed that could not be handled internally. It

was felt that in order to bring back "Team Nepean" there was a need to keep the process focused inwardly. Since this was a corporate plan many new processes were put in place to manage it. Human resources became involved in training programs to assist employees to gain new strengths to undertake changed responsibilities. A core services review was undertaken to clearly spell out what type of business Nepean was in; a "One-Stop-Shopping" framework was put into place to assist the municipal client ; an organizational review took place and new performance appraisal systems were put in place. A monitoring committee was charged with ensuring that action plans to achieve results were successful. Mr. Letourneau felt that the most important factor in the success of a strategic plan was to have a comprehensive communications strategy both during the process of planning and the implementation of the plan. He indicated "it can only be effective if those involved know about it and have been a party to it". He felt that all strategic plans should be flexible to allow them to adapt to the ever changing circumstance of local government.

THE CITY OF GLOUCESTER

Gloucester finalized a corporate strategic plan in 1993. It was driven by the bureaucracy and Council, particularly by the new Mayor. The previous municipal Council had suffered a loss of credibility when they were required to endorse a 29% increase in taxes in one year to undertake essential capital projects. Thus the new Mayor, feeling confident that she understood the wishes of the electorate wanted to put in place a plan that would ensure that such a requirement was never needed again. As well, staff and Council were knowledgeable that the Province would be phasing out grants, and that municipalities would be required to be self-sufficient. It was hoped the strategic plan

would drive policy (particularly financial policy) and establish priorities. The plan adopted a corporate philosophy "The City will Strive to Provide the Highest Quality of Life in Gloucester through the Delivery of Timely and Efficient Services and Programs, which Best Suit the Community and Recognize the Uniqueness of the City". Under this banner it laid out the responsibilities of Council, staff and the public. (This last issue is interesting in that no attempt was made to involve the public in the process - they relied on the knowledge of the community's wishes as expressed by Council). The plan explicitly states that its purpose is to describe a desired corporate direction for the City, both as a corporate entity, and in specific functional areas. It goes on to say "The Strategic Plan is not a static statement. To remain relevant, it will be regularly evaluated and updated in response to a dynamic, continually evolving environment. To optimize its ability to anticipate and respond to changes, we will ensure that urgent strategic requirements are promptly identified, evaluated and addressed. We will undertake a comprehensive annual review and update of all environmental factors, goals and strategies. This will be coordinated with the annual preparation of departmental operational plans and the operating and capital budgets." It identified four major issues: socio-economic, financial, environmental and community partnerships. Mr. Pierre Tessier, City Manager, was hired by Gloucester soon after adoption of the Corporate Strategic Plan. Coming from a strong economic development background Mr. Tessier was charged with implementing strategies to enhance the economic growth of Gloucester. His initial response was to ensure Council was committed to the strategic objectives of economic diversification and growth that had been indicated in the 1993 Strategic Plan. Finding that they were, he put in place a

comprehensive three-year action plan to achieve the goals suggested in the plan. Within this "Economic Adjustment Program" the strategies included, a Mayor's Task Force, a multi-focused marketing campaign, a comprehensive business directory, training sessions for small business and entrepreneurs, a new business welcome program, a re-organized economic development and customer service function. These have achieved to a very large degree the goals indicated in the plan. Mr. Tessier mentioned that a flexible plan was imperative given the changing climate of municipal government. Another area indicated in the Plan was Community Partnerships. Mr. Tessier is currently working with a consultant to provide direction to Council with respect to the enhanced use of the volunteer sector to fill the gap in the provision of municipal services, as the City attempts to come to terms with the reduction in revenue due to the lack of provincial transfer.

He indicated that the plan is used selectively by staff and that the new Council agreed with the objectives of the plan. In response to what makes a plan successful, Mr. Tessier indicated "credibility - it must make sense; ownership- there must be a buy-in by Council and staff; continuous - it should be flexible, an ongoing process, and relate to budgets; it should be a simple process." He expressed that clear action plans were the key to implementing the broad objectives of the strategic plan, and that action plans should drive the budget. Mr. Tessier added some philosophical comments - "a strategic plan and action plans allow people like myself an opportunity to leave a legacy in the long history of the municipality".

TOWNSHIP OF CUMBERLAND

Approximately three years ago Ned Leathrop, Chief Administrative Officer of

Cumberland Township started the process of a strategic plan with training sessions for senior managers being provided by consultants. However, this municipality began the process of reviewing in detail the merits of amalgamating with adjacent Gloucester and following that considerable workload, began reviewing governance with all lower tier municipalities in Ottawa-Carleton except Ottawa. This workload put the strategic planning session on the back burner for two reasons - why do a plan if amalgamation with one or more municipalities might take place in the near future - and, with the additional work involved in governance research and review, and day to day issues to be dealt with, time for strategic planning was severely limited. So, while Mr. Leathrop felt that a strategic plan would be a worthwhile venture for Cumberland, he did not have the time to provide the administrative leadership and he felt strongly it would require. However, given the belt-tightening exercise being forced on Ontario municipalities, the Township did undertake a five-year capital plan that directed priority setting and budgeting both for capital and ongoing operating expense. This helped resolve the problem of conflicting priorities, assisted with the Development Charges By-Law Process and provided future direction with respect to Township expenditures. This plan was an internal corporate plan, driven by the Chief Administrative Officer. While Council is aware of the plan it did not have direct involvement in its preparation. All projects now undertaken by municipal departments relate back to this corporate plan. Mr. Leathrop emphasized that he felt "that strategic planning was important in municipalities, but with rapid growth, constant change, diminishing resources and conflicting governance issues, there really was not enough time". As soon as this was said he noted "but those are all the reasons why we should be

doing strategic planning". He also reiterated that in his opinion, if Cumberland was to undertake any type of strategic planning exercise, the most important factor in both the success of the undertaking and of the outcome was "leadership".

CITY OF OTTAWA

The City of Ottawa has just completed its second strategic plan. The first one, undertaken in 1992 tried to be "all things to all people", said John Burke, Chief Administrative Officer. "Therefore, there really was limited buy-in by both the politicians and staff". As well, Mr. Burke noted "there was no concrete implementation plan". The plan did spell out a Mission Statement and five strategic objectives were identified. Goals were established to support each strategic objective. The process ended at this point, short of developing the necessary linkages to action.

The 1998 plan Mr. Burke considered to be "a corporate plan, with community based features" and was undertaken to try to re-establish the vigour, vitality and viability of the Corporation and protect the services the citizens of Ottawa had come to expect in a time of fiscal restraint brought about by diminished Provincial funding and a population adverse to any increase in municipal taxes. It built on the 1993 plan. The new plan revisited the Vision, Mission, Objectives and Goals to determine whether or not they were still applicable. But the new plan provided implementation measures and ongoing evaluation to ensure the plan stayed on track. It was noted by Mr. Burke that the process recommended borrows heavily from the John M. Bryson book Strategic Planning for Public and Non-Profit Organizations, one of the few texts which this author found could relate to municipal strategic planning during the extensive literature review done on this

topic.

This strategic plan was part of a Corporate Organization Review Exercise also referred to as the Change Agenda. Other components of the Change Agenda were team building, financial review, organization redesign, alternative service delivery and Governance. All of these features were investigated and worked on at the same time as the strategic planning exercise. To some extent Ottawa followed the Burlington model.

Leadership for the new plan was provided by the Chief Administrative Officer, and a Steering Committee, comprised of the CAO, one Department Head, the chairs of each of the City's three Standing Committees as well as five staff selected at large, was established to co-ordinate the strategic planning process. A Public Forum of external stakeholders and an Employee Forum comprised of broad-based staff were established as consultative bodies to the process. The Management Advisory Committee was established as the technical advisory committee to the Steering Committee and an Environmental Scan Team was established to prepare the Environmental Scan Document. In discussion Mr. Burke indicated that while the municipality did not go out to the community to create a "vision for the future", the Steering Committee used the Public Forum and the Staff Forum to test and validate the corporate strategic plan which was prepared by staff (Management Advisory Committee) and reviewed by the Steering Committee. Many suggestions from the Public Forum and the Staff Forum were incorporated into the "Identification of Strategic Issues" report. This Report was then approved by Council and the strategic issues restated as strategic objectives. Task groups were then established for each issue and were to determine the desired goals and provide

strategic direction/policies, intended to promote achievement of the outcomes and objectives. Again the Steering Committee and Public and Staff forums reviewed the output from the task groups. This wide based process brought many players into the program and greatly assisted communication throughout the organization, with the anticipation of acceptance and buy-in by Council and staff. Mr. Burke indicated that the goals were achievable only if everyone believed in them. The City's Communications Centre assisted the Steering Committee to manage the communications process with staff communications, newsletters, surveys, etc.

The implementation phase of the plan saw departments and sections providing work plans that linked with the strategic objectives of the strategic plan. Performance agreements were put in place to ensure what was planned was achieved. All strategic objectives and work plans were tied to the budgets and priorities were established in accordance with them. All reports to Committees or Council identified the strategic objective within the plan to which the report referred.

Linda Black, Project Manager for the strategic planning exercise indicated that the key to the success of the new plan was John Burke's leadership. Mr. Burke agreed that any plan needed a "champion", and while it could be a Chief Administrative Officer, it could also be a politician or another staff person who had the support of the leaders of the organization. Both Ms. Black and Mr. Burke indicated that a communications program was important in order to get the necessary "buy-in" to make the plan work. Any successful plan in Mr. Burke's opinion should link with systems and practices in the organization and the plan must have a direct connection to implementation through action

plans. He felt that in a large organization, like Ottawa, it was necessary to have a strategic plan to ensure all were working in one direction and understood where they were going. He felt, also, that knowledge and expertise were needed to take charge of the plan and make it work, therefore along with communication, there should be a training and development program put in place to assist staff. The recent Ottawa plan, along with all other aspects of the Change Agenda took one year to accomplish. Mr. Burke feels that the Corporation has taken a solid step forward towards a successful future.

TOWNSHIP OF WEST CARLETON

The Township of West Carleton undertook a strategic planning exercise in 1996. While the final plan provided direction towards local economic development, its purpose was to determine from the residents of the Township just what type of community they wished for the future. What precipitated the incentive was the overwhelming requirement by the Regional Government for input on their Official Plan Update. Planner, Tim Chadder emphasized that almost every week new information was being requested in response to large volumes of written material, much of which did not relate to this rural environment. A suggestion from a consultant with experience in strategic planning, Mr. Larry Spencer, was that instead of responding to the Region on their terms, a better approach might be to determine what the Township's vision for its future was and then provide that information to the Region and ask them to respond. Thus a proactive rather than reactive approach was taken. While the strategic planning exercise was endorsed by Council, members deliberately did not take an active part in the process. Instead the West Carleton Action Team was created by Council, consisting of 14 representatives from the

public and business, with consideration for geography, gender, & age. . This group was given the responsibility to work with the chosen consultants to provide a growth management strategy for West Carleton. The intent of the strategy was to set out the community's goals and values to guide future Township decisions, to select actions required to turn the goals and values into achievable results, to identify how and when these results would be achieved, and to define a land use concept specific to the area's natural and built environment that supports the achievement of the community's goals. According to Mr. Spencer, Council, to a very large degree, was suspicious of the Action Team, and was unsure whether or not this whole business of a strategic plan was a good idea. At the beginning, members of the team sought direction from individual members of Council and reported discussion of the team back to these individual members. However, as progress was made and Council perceived the work of the Action Team to have a positive affect, Council became more confident and were supportive of the team's efforts, and the Action Team became more independent.. The Action Team provided regular columns in the local newspapers, a West Carleton Community Profile newsletter was developed and sent to each household, with a questionnaire included, and updates were provided at Council meetings. Six community workshops were held to provide a venue for discussion of issues and to seek information from members of the public. West Carleton's exercise was consultant driven with little staff or Council participation. Only when it appeared successful, did council really get behind the initiative. The Action Team became a driving force and were truly representatives of the community. They took their responsibilities seriously and worked tirelessly to see this project to a successful

conclusion. The Consultant team (Mr. Larry Spencer and Mr. Ted Fobert) provided direction and were responsible for all writing. The Plan provided direction which was sent to the Regional Government as the Township's position on growth. The West Carleton Growth Management Strategy was adopted by Council and has the endorsement of the current Council. The Township is now in the process of providing an implementation plan that will provide funding for action items. Mr. Spencer indicated that from his perspective the success of this plan was the energy, dedication and diligence of the Action Team.

"This diverse group of people brought enormous energy and complete commitment to the task at hand, and were very successful in engaging the public. They remain committed to the growth strategy". A weakness in Mr. Spencer's mind is that there is no staff person assigned to ensure the strategy is kept in the forefront. As well, no workshops were completed with staff to ensure a staff buy-in. Therefore, there is likely to be a void in the implementation of the strategy if Council does not deal with this issue. West Carleton does not have a Chief Administrative Officer, leaving the administrative leadership in Council's hands.

CITY OF KANATA

Mr. Bert Meunier, Chief Administrative Officer, indicated that a strategic planning exercise is about to begin in Kanata. To prepare, a staff person has been seconded from the Planning Department, and has been given the task to research strategic planning in municipalities in Ontario and had been sent away for special education on this topic. Kanata has undertaken internal plans in the past, and Mr. Meunier expressed that the process used to bring about a successful corporate restructuring plan would be used for

the strategic planning exercise. He noted that originally in the corporate restructuring exercise a consultant had been hired. This had met with apprehension by Department Heads. A better solution was achieved when an internal committee was struck. Mr. Meunier noted, however, that if staff are to be engaged in this activity, that back-up should be provided for their positions. He explained that if this is not done, the work will not be taken seriously, and there will always be daily priorities that come ahead of the committee's priorities.

The purpose of the Kanata strategic plan is to position the municipality for the future in case there is a downturn in the economy. It is well known that Kanata relies heavily on the high technology industry and the recent devaluation of currency in Asian nations can have a direct impact on their ability to purchase goods from the Kanata companies. These companies rely heavily on exports, so that any blip in the world monetary system can affect them. If they are affected, then so is the prosperity and quality of life that is very much part of the culture of this City. Mr. Meunier noted that the direction provided his seconded staff person was that the plan should address "no more than two or three make or break issues". He felt that the issues that would be dealt with would be the employment impact on the City; how this would affect growth related issues; and how the municipality would be able to continue to provide a desired level of service if there was a significant reduction in revenue due to loss of jobs. He pointed out that during the time he had been involved in convincing Council to proceed with this endeavour, one firm had closed with a result of 120 jobs gone. A few more like this would have a devastating impact on Kanata, similar to a mine closing in a one industry

town. He felt a strategic plan would allow the municipality to put in place a plan to adapt. Mr. Meunier was clear in his mind that the corporate restructuring plan which had been undertaken and finalized earlier was not a strategic plan because it did not deal with issues. It dealt with efficient and effective management, was driven by the Chief Administrative Officer at the request of Council to "clean up the administration". It was employee driven, and had been successful as indicated above because of employee leadership and participation. The results were a more efficient administration with less layers of bureaucracy.

He felt the current plan was "strategic" in that it would deal with one or two specific issues. It was initiated by the Chief Administrative Officer and did have the endorsement of the Mayor and Council. Because of the success of an internal team approach in the corporate plan, Mr. Meunier intended to use a similar approach again. In response to whether or not he would solicit public input, he indicated that the City had just completed a very comprehensive Official Plan update at which time there had been substantial input from the public. This had been clearly documented, and it was his opinion that since it was recent it was still relevant and would serve the current strategic planning exercise well. He expected that focus groups with City staff would be conducted as well as with Council and some external groups might be called on for validation of findings.

The key steps to manage the plan once it is in place would be to determine a benchmark and then put in place a method of evaluation to ensure progress was occurring. Mr. Meunier emphasized the importance of operationalizing goals - he called them stretch

goals - and again putting in place a method of measuring whether goals were being achieved.

Mr. Meunier cited "leadership from the top" as the most important aspect for success both in the process and the implementation of a strategic plan. He felt inclusiveness, "keeping employees involved" was extremely important and "that a dedicated resource should be put in place to ensure that the job gets done".

TOWNSHIP OF OSGOODE

Mayor Doug Thompson indicated that while Osgoode does not at present have a strategic plan he would like to see one put in place. Councillor Carol Parker agreed that as soon as possible Council and staff should discuss this issue. However, as Mayor Thompson pointed out, this municipality along with West Carleton, Rideau, & Goulbourn have been diligently working together to strategically develop the "Rural Alliance" which would see these four municipalities leave the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton. He felt that while this process is underway, perhaps it would be more meaningful to work with the partners to put in place an implementation program for the alliance. He noted, "if, after a provincial election expected next year, we are still part of the Region and likely to see no change, then we could pursue our own vision for the future". Both Mayor and Councillor felt that leadership and commitment from the top was important in the success of a strategic plan, as well as a comprehensive communications program to solicit input from the public.

VILLAGE OF ROCKLIFFE PARK

This small historic village completely surrounded by the City of Ottawa has not

undertaken a strategic plan. Mr. Murray McLean, Chief Administrative Officer, commented that in recent years they have confined their planning to trying to continue as an independent municipality within Ottawa-Carleton. "With limited staff and an unclear future it is very difficult to do any type of planning", expressed Mr. McLean.

CONCLUSIONS FROM OTTAWA-CARLETON MUNICIPALITIES

The theme of the interviews was to determine what types of strategic plans were being undertaken, why were they done, who was involved in leadership, communication, process. Was the municipality using the plan, how was it being used, and finally, what was the most important factor in the success of the plan.

1. What type of Plan? Using the criteria noted earlier only two plans, those of West Carleton and Goulbourn could be considered "community" plans as both had a major component of community participation. All others would fall into the category of "corporate" because they were formulated for the most part by staff and/or staff and Council. It is noted though that others validated their plan through a focus groups or other committees with representation from the public. Clearly, in many instances the politicians recently elected felt they had the pulse of their community and could, therefore, speak for the people without going back out to them. It is noted in both "community" exercises that there was a comprehensive effort made to educate the public so that they could provide informed input, and as noted specifically by the Mayor of Goulbourn, in spite of the huge distribution and communication program, a very large part of the population did not participate. In larger centres like Ottawa, Nepean & Gloucester, it

would be extremely costly to provide the type of educational material to all households that was provided in the West Carleton and Goulbourn examples. As well, there is the expense, complexity and co-ordination of large group meetings, with diverse economic and cultural groups to consider. However, the larger municipalities do have larger budgets and staffs, and have the same responsibility to their electorate. Perhaps they feel further removed from the constituency than do smaller municipalities or have less interaction with electors..

2. What drove the plan? While growth factors were the drivers in some instances, other municipalities seemed to just want a clear picture of their future so that programs, funding, etc. could be more clearly directed. Others spoke of team building, while others were trying to provide a plan in anticipation of coming events such as reduction in provincial funding, a change in the economy, or were trying to achieve more effective and efficient government.

3. Who provided leadership? Leadership is provided in most instances by the head of the administration and/or the head of Council. It is clear that this is an important factor even though these leaders may not be involved on a day-to-day basis. As was indicated by Ottawa's Chief Administrative Officer, the exercise needs a "champion" to keep it going. Only in the case of West Carleton was the "champion" a community group. As indicated earlier in the comment by Burlington's Michael Fenn, strategic planning is a top-down exercise and is unapologetically political. Such is the case in all of the examples illustrated above. Even West Carleton's Council provided the initiative to get the process going and endorsed the plan when it was finished.

4. What type of communications strategy was used? A wide variety of communications tools were utilized, but one thing was very clear, this is a very important aspect of the plan. Almost all indicated that a buy-in by staff and the community required a plan that made everyone feel part of the action. It was interesting that in the corporate restructuring plan undertaken by Kanata that until the staff committee took over the process it was not having much success, and in the case of Vanier one of the positive outcomes of the exercise was heightened staff morale because they had been informed and involved in the entire process. Given the importance of this facet, it would seem imperative to the writer and a communications strategy should be identified prior to the process beginning. Consideration should be given to using newsletters, meetings, special events, community newspapers, special mailouts, focus groups, and invitations by politicians to "get involved".

5. Who was involved in the process? In the larger municipalities clearly staff play the greatest roles with Council being secondary. Only in Goulbourn and West Carleton was there significant roles for the community and consultants. For example, both Ottawa and Gloucester indicated that they validated their findings with a structured community group while Nepean made no effort to solicit input from the public and Kanata used information gleaned during the Official Plan Update. It would seem to this writer that while the political level, and in some instances the public as well, are the owners of the plan, municipal staff are the keepers of the plan.

6. How was the plan managed? In all interviews it was clear that the Chief Administrative Officer felt it was imperative to have a clear implementation plan,

otherwise the exercise was of little value. Only with an implementation plan could priority setting be done, and if funding was required, funds allocated. In Ottawa and Kanata's case they expect that benchmarking and performance evaluation will be a direct output of their strategic plan. This recent thrust with the intent to tie the plan directly to budgets, program evaluation, benchmarking and even performance evaluation is closing the gap between the strategic planning definition and the comprehensive planning definition.

7. Is the Plan being used? In discussion with Professor Collum of Queens University on the subject of strategic planning, he indicated that in most instances these became "door stoppers". There was little evidence of this in the municipalities reviewed. Only in Rideau's case was the plan not being actively used. Of course, not all aspects of the plan are given the same priority, however, municipalities, such as Gloucester indicated that even a plan as old as 1993 was still providing useful direction to staff and Council.

8. Did changes in Council impact the Plan? There did not appear to be a significant disagreement with the plan when a new Council came into office. This could be because there was not a lot of change on the Councils. As well, with the limited resources now available to municipalities, it is difficult for a Council to completely throw out a plan and begin another.

9. Why was a strategic plan not done? The reasons cited for not doing strategic planning generally were the lack of human and financial resources and the lack of will by Council. An observation by the writer is that municipalities evolve as they grow and perform more than just a caretaker role, as a result of a more diverse community with greater demands. When this occurs they hire better qualified staff, and attract a higher

educated more articulate political group. It is at this time that concern for determining direction for the municipality becomes an important objective. In the Ottawa-Carleton situation, the rural municipalities have recently crossed this threshold. Thus three of the four have attempted some type of strategic planning exercises. It appears the population threshold is approximately 15,000.

10. What was the success factor? This writer expected "leadership" to be front and centre in the response to the most important factor in success. However, it tied with "inclusive" as many felt this aspect to be as important if not more important than leadership. Clearly, both are extremely important to achieve the "buy-in" required to make the plan successful and to ensure that it becomes a 'living' document..

Are these plans "Strategic"?

It was not the intent of the writer to consider this issue, whether or not these plans were strategic in accordance with the Bryson criteria noted earlier in this paper. However, during the review it seemed appropriate to at least take a look and determine whether or not the plans reviewed could be called "strategic"

Earlier we noted that strategic plans (1) rely on the identification of issues; (2) emphasis is place on internal and external environments; (3) they promote a vision of success and how to achieve it; and (4) are more action oriented.

In all plans "issues were identified". There was some weakness in the review of external environments, particularly in the case of Rideau Township, and to a lesser degree the City of Nepean. In the West Carleton situation the internal environment was not reviewed, and thus staff have not 'bought in' to the plan. The community still has

ownership of it without the support of the municipal staff who will be required to put in place implementation programs and to solicit funding approval for action items.

In most instances the "vision of success" is spelled out, but in some instances there is no indication as to how this will be achieved. Simply a statement of goals with no implementation plan. Some may feel this becomes part of a strategic management program which will follow. However, in the "visioning" exercise it is important as indicated clearly in the Vanier example not to "dream in technicolour". By putting in place a plan for achievement, visions are more likely to be realistic. Those who have spelled out implementation programs are action oriented, and most municipalities fall into this category. Several municipalities have gone one step further and linked the strategic plan into internal budgets, performance evaluation, and goal setting processes tying in a comprehensive planning aspect.

Overall, Ottawa-Carleton municipalities are making progress with strategic planning and will continue to benefit from their efforts in the future..

This Region is a fairly complex environment, with eleven lower tier municipalities competing in many ways. Recent downsizing of the federal government resulted in thousands of jobs lost, and although a growing high technology industry has helped the job market, the skill-sets required are different, requiring skills training and a focus on attracting new industries to utilize skills available. The Region's population has a higher than average educational level which results in more knowledgeable constituents who can be more articulate and demanding. Local government is required to address the needs indicated by its population. Perhaps these attempts at strategic planning will assist

municipalities to address strategic issues and find ways, in a tight financial situation, to set priorities and provide the service types and levels demanded. As well, these municipalities are facing constant turmoil as discussions surrounding proposed restructuring in Ottawa-Carleton continue. How will these individual strategic plans be co-ordinated should a major amalgamation of these eleven municipalities take place is an interesting question. As noted earlier, plans should be flexible and adaptable. Will they be adaptable enough to adjust to a major amalgamation? In reviewing the plans, I kept this question in mind. There is indeed enough similarity and flexibility in the plans to allow for co-ordination, should amalgamations occur.

THE BURLINGTON EXPERIENCE

The City of Burlington is known in municipal circles to have been successful in strategic planning endeavours. As early as 1988 this municipality was involved in the strategic planning process, and has continued, with every new Council to reconfirm the plan, and to adjust it as necessary to accommodate changes in Council direction. This City knew they were on the right track when the management consulting firm of Coopers & Lybrand, who were engaged by the Provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs to evaluate the approach to strategic planning by Ontario municipalities, noted that only Burlington conformed to the framework they felt was the appropriate approach to strategic planning in municipalities. Following this commendation, Burlington's plan was heralded as the right way to do municipal strategic plans by Ministry staff. The 1991 plan won the prestigious Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators/Royal Bank of Canada Municipal Education Award given annually to the municipality that makes the most significant contribution to upgrading knowledge in the municipal field. A letter to Heads of Council signed by both Minister of Municipal Affairs David Cooke, and Mayor Bird announced the release of a strategic planning reference manual, "Future Focus: Strategic Planning that Works" and encouraged all Ontario municipalities to benefit from Burlington's experience.

The City of Burlington has just completed its fourth strategic planning exercise in eleven years. This City's mandate is to update their plan with each new Council, to familiarize the new Council with the existing plan and ensure that it meets the needs of the population as seen by the new Council members. This time the plan update was

completed in four months, instead of the eight month period for the previous 1995 plan. Chief Administrative Officer, Tim Dobbie, indicated that both Council and staff worked hard to achieve the 1998 goal as, in his opinion, the earlier the plan is approved the more likely it is that the action items are undertaken during the term of the Council.

The issues in all four plans are similar with this year's effort reducing the issues to six major areas: quality of life/environment; governance (new this year); financial management; infrastructure & community assets; economic development; and culture & heritage, from nine in the original volume. Each area of concern indicates goals to be achieved, strategies to achieve the goals and action plans to implement them, complete with lead players indicated and the target date for completion.

In reviewing all four of Burlington's strategic plans, all of which are called "Future Focus" the writer notes that they have evolved into much tighter documents with the most recent plan only requiring 20 pages while the original plan was some 57 pages. The most recent two plans provide details for implementation including the target date and the person or group responsible for implementation. An action item in the most recent plan notes *"Begin implementation of an activity-based management system, including performance measures for the City's thirty-two key services, which is integrated with the new financial information system"* This item was introduced by Mayor Robert MacIsaac in this year's plan, as part of his platform was to ensure that City services were measured against an approved benchmark.. Chief Administrative Officer, Tim Dobbie, agrees with this approach and noted that many of the politicians, when campaigning, refer to the plan, and part of their platform is associated with items they want addressed in the new plan

when they are elected. Mr. Dobbie feels that the plan is an document that is in the forefront of each politicians mind when he/she is on Council. Similarly, it is front and centre in the minds of staff as part of their work schedule is identified in the implementation of the plan. Most definitely, in Burlington, the Strategic Plan is a living, working document.

WHAT IS BURLINGTON'S SECRET OF SUCCESS?

To try to ascertain why the City of Burlington has been successful in strategic planning, the writer interviewed at length the Chief Administrative Officer, the Mayor, Robert MacIsaac, and a member of Council who was in his second term, Councillor Steve Wallace. As well, telephone discussions took place with a new member of Council, Councillor Lynda Schreiber, former Mayor Roly Bird, and members of the management team. The questionnaire was used as a tool, however, the discussion went much further than the questions listed.

Initially Burlington City fathers were frustrated that they could not pursue a major waterfront development that they felt was an important project for the City and there were other major projects they wished to pursue. While there definitely was a will at the Council table, the bureaucracy refused to get the message and no progress was made. Council felt they wanted to influence the future, and could not do so without utilizing some tool to give them more control of the bureaucracy. Mayor Roly Bird felt that a strategic plan could achieve the desired results. The success of the plan initiated a complete corporate reorganization that gave Council the ability to take control of the future. Thus the strategic planning exercise became a "must do" for all succeeding

Councils. It is noted in the 1995-98 plan "Burlington City Council uses a strategic plan to establish a vision for the municipality and to develop the goals and actions for achieving that vision". The Mayor indicated that doing a strategic plan every three years serves to "take people away from the detail and allows them to focus on the big picture perspective". He indicated that staff can get "bogged down in detail". Councillor Wallace indicated that the strategic plan in his mind "puts Council in a proactive mode". He reflected that it also was a consensus builder for staff and Council, and it allowed new Council member to provide their insights, and if agreed upon, these would become part of the plan. He expressed also that he felt the plan was very "business like" in that it provided a schedule for achievements and the newest one would provide a methodology for evaluating performance. He noted that he mentioned the plan often in his campaign addresses. Mayor MacIsaac also used the plan strategically in his election campaign, addressing the issues noted in it and referring constituents to his views on these issues. All three interviewees indicated that the plan is Council driven and is a guiding document used by Council in its deliberations. Both the Mayor and Councillor indicated that this did not preclude the consideration of new items, and that it did not drive all aspects of municipal business. Councillor Schreiber, new this term, appreciated the strategic planning exercise because it brought her quickly "up to speed" with City issues and helped her to quickly become part of the "city team". She felt the condensed process this year was excellent, but cautioned that it meant long days and a very high energy mental process. She noted that the Council was very committed to the plan, so committed, in fact that they had even determined the colours to be used in the printed version.. She felt the 1998 plan would

serve the City well into the millenium. Councillor Schreiber reminded the writer of comments by both Mayor MacIsaac and Councillor Wallace when she noted how different and frustrating the Halton Region strategic planning exercise was. As members of Regional Council as well, these three found that the staff driven, inflexible attitude at the Region made it very difficult to influence decision making, a role Burlington politicians take seriously.

Clearly Council provided leadership in all four plans, with senior staff, especially the Chief Administrative Officer taking a leading role. The Mayor noted that there was equality in the process, ideas of staff were as important as those of Council. An interesting comment by both the Mayor and Councillor was that this year the plan was completed in four months mostly because all members of Council were members of the team. Thus, they were fully involved from the very beginning. (Previously Burlington had a 17 person Council. This changed with the 1997 election with only 7 members of Council). All noted that both Council and staff involved on the strategic planning team took this work very seriously and set aside time to attend the meetings.

Mr. Dobbie noted that he feels it is important to set the stage for the Strategic Planning Exercise by taking the team away for an overnight retreat to discuss issues, determine the current situation, and to generally let the members of the team become comfortable with one another. This team building exercise met with some outrage in the local press this past year, however, Mr. Dobbie feels it is still important for the group to get away and concentrate on the project in the early stages. While this was only a Friday noon to Saturday noon event, it served the purpose of allowing staff and Council to

mingle in an informal setting which enhanced the opportunity to speak freely and made the team a cohesive unit. Councillor Schreiber noted that this event helped her as a new Councillor to feel part of the team.

In reviewing the plans with Mr. Dobbie, we agreed that Burlington's was not a traditional community strategic plan because there was not widespread consultation with a broad public (as had been the case in the Goulbourn/Stittsville and West Carleton plans). He noted that the plan only deals with issues that are under the direct control and influence of Council and the public consultation portion of the planning process serves to validate the findings of the Strategic Planning Team. There are two public consultation groups - one consists of approximately 30 members of specific stakeholder groups, and the other of 50 members of the general public. Each member of the public who chooses to participate is paid \$50. and is required to "do their homework provided by the City" prior to the meeting. Both the Mayor and the Councillor felt this was a very important part of the process and were delighted with some of the suggestions that came forward. Mr. Dobbie indicated by paying for this service, participants took the process very seriously and brought good insights to the table. During the process the Mayor and Council wrote articles for the newspaper, and discussed the plan with constituents at ward meetings. They provided questionnaires to constituents and ensured that those interested were included in the public consultation group. Information sessions were provided for City staff and staff were invited to provide input for consideration by the Team..

Mr. Dobbie explained that for the first two strategic planning exercises, consultants had been hired to look after the process, however, he found that the two most

recent plans undertaken by two staff facilitators were more effective. With Burlington's experience in strategic planning, this is to be expected. Because the plan is such a high profile document, staff are aware of it and its impact on City business.

As explained earlier, this year's plan clearly outlines how it will be implemented:

"Specific lead roles and target dates have been established for each strategy. Lead roles for the most part are assigned to City staff members, however, participation by local boards and committees, community organizations and other key staff will be essential.

A new Strategic Action Plan format is being proposed which will integrate the implementation of Future Focus goals and strategies directly with corporate and divisional business plans, the new performance measurement framework and the budget process

Future Focus goals and implementation responsibilities will be incorporated directly into employee performance targets as part of the Performance Evaluation System

The City Manager will report semi-annually to the Administration and Finance Committee on the implementation status of all Future Focus strategies."

Mr. Dobbie explained that one of the weaknesses of the 1988 and 1991 plans was that they were not specific enough in the implementation area. Although the plan indicated that an implementation program would be put in place, it was outside of the strategic plan and did not have any effective means of evaluation. It is expected that the current plan, which has already driven a comprehensive Activity Based Costing/Management & Performance Measures report, will be successful in achieving the results anticipated and evaluating them in accordance with an established benchmark. A "Burlington Report Card" will be provided to Council by Mr. Dobbie semi-annually.

Of interest to note is a comment by Mr. Dobbie. He indicated that this year

Council felt confident enough with the plan to take it out to the general staff of the municipality and ask for their input. Staff were asked to provide suggestions and to zero in on a few "drop dead issues". Staff provided two "drop dead issues", one was that the City should consider the aspect of multiculturalism which is becoming more apparent in Burlington, and the other was that from a financial management perspective the time frame in the plan, as shown, was impractical - there would not be sufficient funds in the given time frame to fund the projects indicated. Council incorporated both of these suggestions into the plan.

When questioned about the most important factor of the success of the Burlington strategic plans all three indicated that it was Council's plan, they knew it, they took it seriously and supported it. It required full participation of Council and commitment to see the process through and support the plan when it was in place. Staff, also were well aware of its importance, and understood the plan and their role in its implementation. This speaks to the leadership issue and communication issues related to strategic planning and emphasizes the importance of these to features. It was noted that by doing the plan with each new Council that it was a team-building exercise for both Council and senior staff. The Mayor indicated that the document was important to Council in that it allowed them "to get things done that had come out of their election campaigns".

So what are the secrets of Burlington's success? First, strategic planning has become very much part of the culture of the organization. To update the plan is among the first things on each new Council's agenda. Council and senior staff take the process to prepare and update the plan seriously, and give it the time that is required to do the job

properly. Politicians use the plan to solicit input from their constituencies prior to the election and attempt to incorporate the wishes of their constituents into the plan, thus tying the plan to the electorate.. Second, the plan spells out short and long term goals, provides strategies to achieve the goals and a detailed implementation program that indicates the staff/Councillor/Committee involved and the target date for implementation. The Burlington plan is complete tool for managing the strategic issues identified . Staff take direction from the plan. The plan is realistic - it looks both at the long term goals (up to 25 years) and the short term goals (3 years - Term of Council) and keeps the work of the municipality focused. Third, there is total commitment by Council & staff. The Strategic Planning Team (All of Council, five senior staff, two in-house facilitators, and six staff volunteers) work diligently to update the plan. They review the vision and mission statements to determine validity. It is worthwhile noting that the first two plans had a three part Vision/Mission Statement that emphasized that Burlington wished to be "Southern Ontario's Best Home Town", "A Great Place to do Business" and "A City in a Natural Setting", while the more recent versions are more concise. 1995 - "Burlington is a modern city offering its people a fulfilling quality of life. Burlington is ideally situated between the Niagara Escarpment and Lake Ontario, and bridges the Greater Toronto Area with the Hamilton/Niagara areas. Burlington is a well planned community that carefully balances its urban and rural environment to respond effectively to the expectations and choices of its residents and businesses". The 1998 version is more concise still "Burlington is recognized as a progressive, Great Lake City along the Niagara Escarpment, known for its leadership and commitment to maintaining our unique natural

heritage, community values and vibrant urban and rural lifestyles - a place to belong!

"A Place to Belong" has become Burlington's slogan for its 125th Anniversary. If one considers the Vision/Mission statements above there appears to be an evolution of the City's development and the last one indicates that it has reached a level of confidence and can stand alone without explicitly mentioning connections to others. It feels confident that it has achieved the goals set out of being Ontario's Best Home Town, A Great Place to do Business, and a City in a Natural Setting. By working through four successive plans, the City has documented its achievements and feels comfortable with "who it is". The City has proudly "come of age". Fourth, the City uses its strategic plans on a regular basis to conduct its business and to move forward to the Vision stated. The plans are working documents for staff and Council.

In summary, Burlington believes in its plan, is committed to the process and implementation, and considers the plan the guiding document for the conduct of City business.

Is Burlington's a Strategic Plan?

Looking at the four criteria noted previously, identification of issues, emphasis on internal and external environments, promotion of vision of success and how to achieve it, and action oriented, clearly the Burlington plan meets all criteria. As well, Burlington is attempting to extend the strategic plan to encompass a comprehensive planning component by attaching program evaluation, benchmarking and performance review and by tying the plan to the budget process.

CONCLUSIONS

This research project was intended to determine (1) whether or not municipalities in Ontario are using strategic planning as a tool, (2) if so, how successful is it?, (3) what factors contribute to success both in the initial stages and in implementation, (4) whether or not changes in Council impact the plan, and (5) what types of circumstances precipitated the need for a plan.

The writer conducted specific research in all eleven municipalities in Ottawa-Carleton and in the City of Burlington. As well, many other strategic plans from Ontario municipalities were reviewed either on the Internet or by reading a copy of the plan. It is clear that many municipalities, especially those with a population of over 12,000 have undertaken plans, and are using them in varying degrees, from Rideau who does not appear to be using the plan at all, to Burlington who uses it as a guiding document for the majority of municipal business.

In many instances the plan is being utilized successfully, particularly in the Cities of Ottawa and Burlington, and to a lesser degree in Gloucester and Nepean. Goulbourn, in the Stittsville Community Development Strategy uses the document as a tool to guide development and West Carleton have been successful in providing clear direction to the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton with respect to what type of municipality West Carleton wishes to be.

The most important success factor is the leadership and commitment of Council to the initiation of the plan and the implementation of the plan. Burlington's example spells

this out clearly. As well, there must be a buy-in by senior members of staff to ensure that the plan is considered and the implementation program takes place. Burlington's Chief Administrative Officer indicated that "strategic planning had become part of the City's culture" This definitely contributes to the success of the plan. Of importance also, is the need to include representation from all parts of the community. In the case of West Carleton and Goulbourn, this was done on a wide scale, with Burlington and Ottawa using specific committees to validate the Strategic Planning Teams' plan. There appears to be more success when the plan is facilitated by internal staff as in Burlington, Kanata and Ottawa's case. As well most successful plans had an organized communication's strategy-methods of getting the word out and receiving input back. A clearly defined implementation program was a strong success factor with Burlington providing an excellent example, and the importance of tying the plan into operations and then evaluating the achievements against an approved benchmark were key features for Burlington, Ottawa, Kanata.

There is no indication that changes in Council impact strategic plans. The Burlington example shows that the plan is amended to accommodate the ideas of the new Councillors if agreement is reached. In other municipalities reviewed, new Councils received the plans when elected, and there was no indication that they were not in agreement.

There were a variety of circumstances which precipitated the strategic planning exercises reviewed. Many dealt with providing a focus for municipal business - Gloucester, Vanier, Rideau, Ottawa and the most recent efforts from Burlington. Others

such as Goulbourn and West Carleton were undertaken to provide direction with respect to proposed growth. The initial Burlington plan was put in place to address Council's wishes with respect to waterfront development, a specific issue of high value to the Council of the day. Mention should also be made to the impacts on municipalities by the province - reduced transfer payments, down-loading of services, and proposed restructuring. These provide municipalities the impetus to address "what business are we really in?"

If I was to provide some criticism to the strategic planning efforts in many municipalities it would be that they are attempting too many issues. A lecture to private sector professionals at Queen's University on this topic, emphasized "focus, focus, focus". Burlington has reduced the issues to six in the last plan and Ottawa has seven. Goulbourn only had one issue in the Stittsville Community Development Plan, whether Stittsville should grow or not. Kanata intends to zero in on two or three "drop dead issues". For a municipality to handle more than three can mean that the effort is weakened and the achievement reduced. However, advice provided to private sector firms does not always apply directly to municipal government. One must keep in mind the diversity of municipalities and this diversity could be the key reason why it is so difficult for a municipality to zero in on just two or three issues.

WHY A STRATEGIC PLAN?

From the research presented there appears to be sound logic for municipalities to consider strategic planning. We note that it assures focus of issues, encourages consensus in decision making, assists political priority setting, provides direction to staff and is a

guide to the community with respect to the desired vision. Councillor Mike Wallace of Burlington expressed that it provided valuable assistance to him in responding to questions from constituents. When asked what he did as a Councillor, he provided a copy of the Future Focus Plan in response to the query. The plan made the explanation easy, Council had done their homework, they knew where they were going.

The writer's experience is that two decades ago the only plans undertaken by Council was the Official Plan (if it absolutely had to be done) and the annual budget. Even the budget was simply a document to account for how funds were expended. Council had little say in this exercise. It was devised by staff and presented to Council as a finished document. Little discussion took place; there was general acceptance that if staff said a 10% tax increase was needed, then, of course it was needed. No issues, no strategies for achievement, no action items, no evaluation. The electorate of the day took little interest as long as roads were plowed and water flowed in the taps. This was the era of large transfer payments from the Province and annual increases in taxes.

The new reality of provincial downloading, declining transfer payments, limited tax increases and a very demanding electorate reminds Councils and professional municipal managers that "accountability" and "efficiency" are today's highest priorities. Not only must Council provide a wide variety of services, it must provide them effectively and efficiently. It must be able to prove to the electorate that it is giving good value for the tax dollars expended. In many instances it is compared to private sector suppliers, and asked why it can't measure up. It must show clearly that tax dollars are being spent in the best interests of the inhabitants of the municipality, and that the services provided are

those that are desired by the majority of the population.

Council, through the strategic planning exercise, can choose between competing issues, provide strategies for achievement, put in place an implementation program and techniques to evaluate results. Strategic planning can assist Ontario municipalities to adapt to the new reality. Even if they are not perfect in terms of the “strategic criteria” listed early in this paper, in this writer’s opinion, they are still worth the effort.

BLUEPRINT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING IN ONTARIO MUNICIPALITIES

- 1. Determine the reason(s) for undertaking the plan.**
- 2. Ensure leadership, commitment and support by Council. Ensure leadership, and commitment by senior staff. Determine a "champion".**
- 3. Ensure staff have adequate time to devote to this important task. If there is a need to second an employee(s) full-time ensure there is back-up for their normal positions. Ensure specific training in "how-to" for facilitators. Ensure Council is involved in all meetings and discussions.**
- 4. Set the stage by convening a special event to ensure that the team know one another and are comfortable in their roles. Review existing plan if one in place**
- 5. Determine early in the process what the communication plan will be. Appoint a communications co-ordinator to ensure that this aspect is given the resources required and that the plan is followed.**
- 6. Be clear in the "Issues" of the Plan. Keep "Issues" at a minimum. (Burlington had six, Gloucester three, Ottawa seven) Be realistic.**
- 7. Indicate corporate goals relating to issues, both short and long term, the strategies to achieve these goals, and an implementation program to undertake the strategies. Be realistic.**
- 8. The implementation program should direct who will take ownership and what the time frame for completion is.**
- 9. The implementation program should link to municipal budget, program evaluation, performance review, official plans, and any others, where possible.**
- 10. Update the plan on a regular basis - at least every three years with new Council.**

The above guide provides direction with respect to strategic planning and strategic management of the plan.

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(Appendix A - Discussion Guide)

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **Has your municipality undertaken a strategic plan? If so, when?
(If No - please go to question 10)**
2. **What type of plan is it? - community, corporate, economic development, etc.**
3. **What circumstances precipitated the need to undertake this type of exercise?**
4. **Who or what groups provided the leadership in development of the plan?**
5. **What type of communications strategy was used during the planning process?**
6. **Who was involved in the process? (Staff, community members, councillors?etc.)**
7. **What steps were put in place to manage the Plan?**

8.. Is the Plan being used by the municipality?

9. Did the recent changes in Council impact the Plan?

10. If you did not undertake a Strategic Plan, was there a specific reason for not doing so?

11. In your opinion, what is the single most important factor in the success of a strategic planning exercise?

Please feel free to provide any other comments that would be relevant to this topic.