

CITY OF VENTURA

---

# CITY MEMORANDUM

---

**DATE:** January 17, 2023

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Akbar Alikhan, Acting City Manager

**SUBJECT:** Upcoming City Council Goal-setting Session

Over the past several weeks, members of the City Council have asked me what I believe to be the greatest needs of our organization as the Council heads into its goal-setting session later this month. Rather than provide my own opinion, I first wanted to consult the executive team and develop a list that reflected the group's perspective. On December 21, 2022, the executive team held a one-day offsite meeting to discuss the top priorities the organization needs to focus on to best serve our community.

The themes and strategies contained in this memorandum are those that the executive team feels would be most impactful, for where the organization is right now. This list is informed by conversations with employees, interactions with community members, and the results of the 2022 employee engagement survey. These are intended to be data points for the Council to consider as it prepares for the goal-setting session and are in no way meant to drive this important process. Additionally, these themes are not intended to limit the Council's scope on goal-setting. The executive team and I anticipate the Council may desire to develop goals beyond the three themes named in this memorandum.

There are existing goals that are currently consuming staff capacity and will continue to do so in the upcoming year, limiting our ability to take on new initiatives right away. Some of the existing goals are nearing completion, while others are still several years away from completion. Some goals require a great deal of staff resources, while others steadily advance with modest amounts of staff time. Council could choose to eliminate any existing goal, with the caveat that there may be operational, legal, or economic consequences of doing so. Nonetheless, staff feels it is important for Council to have an inventory of the existing workload, whether the goal is worthy of reconsideration or not. Furthermore, a summary of the Community Development Department's work plan will be appended, given the considerable interest in land use initiatives these past few years. The Quarterly City Council Goals Update at the January 23<sup>rd</sup> City Council Meeting will provide a status of the existing goals.

<b>Theme #1: Creating a culture of customer service</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<p>Our responsiveness to the community directly impacts our reputation as a City. For many residents, their only interaction with the City may be the occasional phone call or email to request a basic service. Their customer experience on this front often colors their entire opinion of the City. Phone calls sent to voicemail and emails without responses erode our customers' confidence in the City's ability to provide basic customer service.</p> <p>Organizations with exceptional customer service dedicate resources, provide employee training, and implement responsive systems required to provide a high-quality level of service. These, in turn, create ownership over the operation, improve the transparency of service, and accountability to the customer.</p> <p>We have customer service successes in many work groups across the organization. These bright spots are worthy of emulation. While I am thankful that we have these bright spots, a customer service deficiency in <u>any</u> work group reflects poorly on the City as an entity.</p> <p>With clear direction, training, accountability measures in place, and the tools to successfully help staff manage customer inquiries, the bright spots can become the standard and ultimately ingrained into the organization's culture.</p>
<b>Strategies to Consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Answer the main line to City Hall by a live person and eliminate the rotation of the answering duties between departments.</li> <li>B. Adopt revised customer service standards with a timeframe to achieve and maintain the standard, including commitments to fellow employees.</li> <li>C. Conduct customer service training for all staff regularly interacting with customers.</li> <li>D. Implement a new 311/Customer Response Management (CRM) system to better track and manage customer inquiries and responses. Assign oversight of the 311/CRM system to a workgroup. Educate the public on how to use the new 311/CRM system.</li> </ul>

<b>Theme #2: Rebuilding relationships</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<p>Our success as an organization is predicated on strong community connections and positive working relationships. One of Ventura's unique elements is that it is a City that thrives on community and personal connections, more so than most cities. These connections build familiarity and create trust that lays the foundation for our work. While this may seem abstract or like a feel-good concept, it has a tangible impact on our ability to serve the public.</p> <p>These relationships come in many forms: staff and staff, staff and Council, Council and Council, staff and the community, and the City (as an entity) and its partners – to name a few. During COVID, relationships became difficult to establish or maintain. As an added challenge, the City brought on many new employees who tried in earnest to learn about their coworkers, the organization, and connect with the community the best they could.</p> <p>Going forward, the City needs to renew its commitment to forging and building relationships, both internally and externally. This is an essential part of our job duties, just like the technical aspects of our work.</p>
<b>Strategies to Consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Create regularly programmed visits from partner agencies at City Council meetings to provide updates during the special presentation section of meetings.</li> <li>B. Create opportunities for the community to connect with City Councilmembers and/or Directors to have recurring meet and greets at coffee shops and other public settings.</li> <li>C. Foster relationships with internal and external customers with timely feedback through employee evaluations as well as customer service feedback.</li> </ul>

<b>Theme #3: Investing in our workforce</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<p>We can only care for our community if we invest in our staff. Although there are other factors to workplace satisfaction beyond compensation, the City's disparity in compensation relative to its peers continues to have operational impacts and remains a consistent theme among the workforce. Much of our workforce acknowledges that we may not be able to pay as well as some of our peers and choose to earn less in exchange for the working environment and culture the City offers. However, there is a limit to the pay disparity one is willing to tolerate before seeking opportunities elsewhere.</p>

	<p>The City’s compensation has long lagged behind its peers, but it seems to have intensified over the past few years with inflationary pressures and the high cost of housing in our region.</p> <p>It is my opinion, if we can pair our workplace culture with more competitive pay, we will see greater longevity and less turnover. Longevity is key to staff training and development – two other drivers of workplace satisfaction. Conversely, employee development, succession planning, and specialized training become increasingly difficult when there is a greater degree of turnover. With more competitive compensation, employees will tend to stay longer, and our managers and supervisors can spend more time developing the existing staff versus recruiting new staff that need to be retrained.</p> <p>To make this possible, the City needs to develop a pathway to competitive compensation and exercise restraint when considering new programs. Additionally, it may mean investing on the other side of the ledger to drive revenues through economic development. It is unlikely that the City will have the means to make large strides toward parity overnight. Nonetheless, if we can demonstrate that we as an organization are taking steps to address compensation and making investments in our workforce, I feel many will choose to stay.</p>
<p><b>Strategies to Consider</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Complete the class and compensation study and prioritize the implementation of compensation adjustments, with a pathway to competitive pay.</li> <li>B. Develop a strategy to reduce the length of vacancies and/or allow for overlapping of exiting/entering staff members.</li> <li>C. Create a standard schedule for the various departmental recognition programs and create a unified recognition program to celebrate employee performance and accomplishments.</li> <li>D. Create and provide a citywide training program to support employee development.</li> </ul>

I hope the City Council finds the above insight from the executive team helpful in developing its goals. Please let me know if there are any points contained in this memo that I can help clarify or expound on. I look forward to a productive discussion on January 28.

Thank you,  
 Akbar