



Planning and Public Safety Committee Meeting

February 15, 2022

Summary and Motions

Chair J. Brown called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Committee Members Ellinger, McCurn, Lamb, Kloiber, Baxter, Bledsoe, Reynolds, and Plomin were in attendance. Committee Member Worley was absent. Vice Mayor Kay, Council Members Moloney, LeGris, Sheehan, and F. Brown were also present as non-voting members.

I. Approval of January 18, 2022 Committee Summary

Motion by McCurn to approve the January 18, 2022 Committee Summary. Seconded by Ellinger. Motion passed without dissent.

II. On the Table – CivicLex and Commerce Lexington

J. Brown began by explaining that *On the Table* is a city-wide public engagement process used to inform the Comprehensive Plan. He introduced Richard Young, Executive Director of CivicLex, who explained that the *On the Table* conversations take place in-person and virtually and are designed to facilitate relationships and discuss city issues. *On the Table* began in Chicago in 2014 and became the model to serve as the public engagement process for the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is required by state statute to be updated every five years and public engagement is a crucial piece of the process. He spoke about the 36 person Advisory Group created by CivicLex which helped design program structure, solicit support, analyze surveys, recruit hosts, leverage relationships, etc. In 2020, changes were made to the model, including extending to a week-long conversation; revision of the survey and data collection process; providing digital and hybrid options; conversation designs; language accessibility; and areas of focus. The conversation process has been restructured to have the survey first to serve as a point of reflection before the conversation. Survey questions are oriented around the five themes of the Comprehensive Plan. Data will be anonymized and open sourced after *On the Table* to enhance research and provide transparency. People will be able to participate virtually, in-person, or through a hybrid model and hosts will have a guide to help facilitate good conversation after completing the survey. To increase accessibility, CivicLex is focusing on making all materials distributed in English, Swahili, Arabic, Spanish, and French. Registration is now live and can be communicated through newsletters and social media.

Plomin asked if Commerce Lexington is coming under CivicLex's organization and Young explained that Commerce Lexington is organizing an additional input process that is in tandem with *On the Table*. Plomin requested background on why they came forward and if the same process would be used. Kevin Atkins, Chief Development Officer in the Mayor's Office, clarified that in looking at what the community engagement has been in previous plan with *On the Table*, they realized the neighborhood component worked well, but the business community input was missing. Commerce Lexington offered to gather input and ensure there was a concerted effort to have a focus on getting the business community input into what makes Lexington attractive and what issues need to be looked at from a business perspective. He added that Planning is putting together a video to explain more about the Comprehensive Plan.

McCurn and Young discussed the format of the conversations and Young explained that CivicLex will publish a number of resources online regarding best practices for virtual, in-person, and hybrid

conversations and hosts can choose any of these options. He pointed out that virtual conversations will not be centralized through a particular meeting account, such as Zoom. Those conversations will be managed by the host and the conversations can be recorded for future reference if the host chooses to do so. Young confirmed that after the data is received and anonymized, the entire data set will be published on the CivicLex website.

Baxter asked if there is a plan to compare the data being collected this year to the data collected from the last *On the Table*. Young explained the difficulty in comparing the data because there are different questions and different topics, there may be different opportunities to compare summaries of the data.

Kloiber and Young confirmed that survey questions would be standardized and Young stated that the intent is for each participant to have a similar experience. Kloiber asked if there was a plan to include comparative questions. Young explained that the challenge is that the information collected must be accessible across the spectrum of awareness of civic issues. They start the process by asking a general question as to what the most useful data would be and from there, the initial draft of questions were formed. The quantitative question is very broad and is not meant to be specific or to get into policies or individual issues. The qualitative questions are broad and open-response questions and test runs have proven these to produce robust conversations. Kloiber reiterated that we may want to work information into the questions so the data received is useful.

Lamb asked what the intention is behind using the words "unlisted" and "private" conversations. Young explained that *On the Table* has always allowed private, household conversations and he emphasized the importance for families to have these conversations so they like to provide that option. He said they don't see people register to attend a table that is private; it is more for hosts to be able to sign up so they can be provided with the resources and materials to be able to participate. He said a number of hosts sign up for an unlisted conversation so the meeting is only public for the group participating. Lamb encouraged a welcoming and inclusive environment.

LeGris asked if there will be host guides and packets that would help manage difficult or contentious moments during conversations. Young said a host guide will be provided and will also be available on the website. There will also be host trainings provided for those who want to attend to help navigate the conversations. LeGris asked what the next steps are for those who are excited about the Comprehensive Plan after having the conversations. Young said there are opportunities for civic education and there are a number of opportunities for people to get involved through CivicLex.

Kay spoke about how *On the Table* was originally a way for people to gather and talk more generally about concerns, then it got tied to an aspect of the planning process, and now it is closely linked to the planning process. While there are advantages to this, he is concerned about the downside. He mentioned that surveys are limited because there is a limited amount of time with a universe of information to cover so you choose things that can be easily answered. This structure encourages certain kinds of information and discourages other kinds of information. He expressed concern that this is not a random sample, but it is a sample of convenience and it lacks a certain kind of validity in terms of gathering information. Kay and Young discussed having language in the description referencing the five areas that reflect the structure of the Comprehensive Plan. Young added that there will be an additional page included with the participant surveys and host guides to explain the Comprehensive Plan. Kay commented on the line, "the City of Lexington will use this information to set goals for how the city grows" and he suggested using language that would clarify and lower the expectations so that the public understands the scope of their input.

Reynolds and Young discussed guides and Young clarified that there will be host guides available which walks through how to host a conversation. There will also be a script the host could follow or they can take the conversation in the direction they choose. Reynolds asked what strategy would be used to communicate language accessibility and Young said there are English and Spanish posters going up currently which are available today and the next phase will include marketing materials in all five languages. He said there are also a number of folks from non-English speaking communities engaged with us. Young added that the host guide and participant survey will be translated into all five languages as well and the data collected will be translated back into English to be coded.

Bledsoe and Young discussed how the process has changed from being a broad, unscripted process where data was collected and presented in different ways and Young said *On the Table* now takes more of a bend toward policy. This year it is focused on the Comprehensive Plan, but there will be a different focus each year depending on what is happening. He said the shift in how they think about the data in *On the Table* and the reason why the survey was built the way it was is in response to criticism because this is something they have heard. He said the hope is to collect a good sample and make this as statistically significant and relevant as possible. He clarified that CivicLex only collects data and the City decides how to use it.

Sheehan spoke about the importance of the demographic section of the survey which a researcher would take to compare to the larger population. She said this will determine whether a sample is representative of the community. She mentioned that the Comprehensive Plan is about planning for the future, not only for us, but for the youth as well. She asked if opportunities will be provided for youth and young adults to provide input. Kit Anderson, with CivicLex, said she is leading a youth working group with FCPS to get tables in the schools, with a focus on middle and high schools and eventually they will look into elementary schools. Sheehan and Anderson discussed having tables at colleges and Anderson mentioned that Transylvania, UK and BCTC are "super-hosts" and are planning their own student engagement efforts, but they are very much involved.

Ellinger spoke about how this process is different from how it began when it was open dialogue and conversations could be about anything. He said a major issue being discussed right now is youth violence/gun violence and asked if that would be part of these conversations. Young said that youth violence came up frequently in neighborhood conversations because it is something that is impacting neighborhoods. Ellinger and Young discussed whether there would be enough information about the Comprehensive Plan to educate the public and Young said there will be a one page document that explains the Comprehensive Plan as well as a video which will be available to all hosts.

Brown welcomed Carla Blanton from Commerce Lexington, who explained she has worked with Division of Planning, the Mayor's Office and CivicLex to have a parallel track that would augment *On the Table*, specifically targeting the business sector. Blanton noted that the meetings will coincide with CivicLex's *On the Table* during the week of April 6-12. She explained that she will be facilitating these and they will take place at Commerce Lexington. They see this as a qualitative exercise to understand what is and isn't working and what could be done better to grow jobs in Lexington. They will use various social media networks and communication channels to promote this and information collected will be shared with Division of Planning, Council, and the Planning Commission. Meetings will begin with a Comprehensive Plan overview and an explanation of how this impacts business.

Plomin and Blanton clarified there is a survey, but it is not the same survey CivicLex is using and there will be different questions. Plomin asked how the data is processed and Blanton said they would talk through the questions with city partners and CivicLex. They will use more of a focus-group approach to take more of a qualitative dive into people's perspectives and experiences. She added that there will be an online

survey people can complete if they are unable to participate in-person. Plomin asked how the data would intermingle with data from CivicLex and Blanton explained that it will be separate data because they are not asking the same questions. By talking with business leaders, they will focus on jobs and economic development. Plomin asked what the intent is and Blanton said it is to have something that will provide more detail to help shape public policy. Plomin spoke about the business feedback page and asked if there would be a report-out to the community and Blanton said the results will be made public.

Kay expressed concern about an effort underway by Commerce Lexington called *Lexington for Everyone*, of which Blanton is a board member. He expressed concern that from certain perspectives, information included there is one-sided and he is concerned these conversations could be framed in the same way. Blanton spoke about *Lexington for Everyone* and said Commerce Lexington is involved, but it has broader base which includes equity partners, people impacted by affordable housing, and small business owners. It is a variety of people who have come together who want to provide an additional perspective to the one that most people might be familiar with. Kay asked for clarification that this is not an initiative of Commerce Lexington primarily and Blanton said Commerce Lexington is involved in it, but it is not solely Commerce Lexington. Kay restated that his perspective, based on what is posted online, is that *Lexington for Everyone* takes a one-sided view of a set of issues and he questions the data and the argumentation. Blanton noted that their goal with this is to provide a perspective from the business community to help the city make more informed public policy decisions.

Sheehan asked about design of the data collection and who has been involved in designing the survey. Blanton noted that they are in the beginning stages of designing, but the survey has not been finalized. She explained that the quantitative data would show percentages and would pertain to demographic information. Sheehan and Blanton confirmed that Council would see the finalized survey before it is implemented and hear more about who has been involved in designing the survey. Sheehan noted the importance of different voices in this process which has been the intent of *On the Table*, but she would like to see more collaboration and consistency across the data sets and maybe a combined survey that includes questions from both groups so that data is more holistic for comparisons.

Reynolds agreed that there should be collaboration and more consistent questions. Some of the questions should be directly toward businesses in regard to the Comprehensive Plan, but also overlap with what CivicLex is doing to create more of a holistic picture. She recalled the first *On the Table* and said it was complicated to get people engaged in the process and it is still difficult for people to wrap their mind around what is happening at *On the Table* because there is so much involved in these conversations. She also stressed the importance of reporting the data in a way that it is not slanted so she would like to see more cohesion between the surveys.

LeGris asked if there would be any harm using the *On the Table* survey that touches on the Comprehensive Plan while also having other survey questions as a way to standardize the data being collected and quantify the conversations. Blanton said they would be open to that but the challenge will be managing these goals while maintaining fidelity to the original intent which was to take a deeper dive on business issues. LeGris and Blanton discussed that the intent behind this is to get input on the Comprehensive Plan which Blanton clarified it is taking a deeper dive and getting a little more into the business perspective and the “jobs” pillar rather than focusing more broadly on all of the pillars. For the sake of transparency, Blanton and LeGris confirmed the conversation guides and questions would be shared once they are finalized. LeGris and Blanton discussed having the *On the Table* survey available to those who take part in the business portion and Blanton added that they will also be encouraged to take part in the *On the Table* conversations.

Kloiber noted this is a self-selecting process and people who have the time and the desire are participating. He also mentioned that because this survey will have qualitative approach as opposed to quantitative, it should be separate from the other data we are getting. He asked if comparative or informative statements would be added as an education piece as well as asking people to make decisions for one thing over another. Blanton said they hope the video sets the stage for some of this, but it is something we can do. Kloiber welcomed any other groups who want to talk about a specific aspect in this multi-faceted growth model for the city to participate in the process.

Regarding the survey, Lamb asked who Commerce Lexington would be working with from the city. Blanton said they are working with the Mayor's Office, CivicLex, and Division of Planning. Lamb echoed concerns about using the same survey questions, but she would like this to be more of a collaborative effort for the Advisory Group. Blanton said they will work closely with CivicLex for communication to the Advisory Group.

Baxter mentioned that there might be confusion from everyone by using *On the Table* verbiage. While it's important to have business community input, she questioned why they chose this time because it is a conversation that can be had at any time. Blanton said they were asked to come forward and augment what was going on and they were happy to offer their services. Baxter noted that this is important, but if we aren't using the same questions across the board, it is kind of a misnomer. She looks forward to the results that come out of the survey and the conversations, but there may be some confusion across the community.

J. Brown expressed similar concerns regarding the questions and the input we will receive from the questions. He said when it comes to the Comprehensive Planning process, the information we get from public input gets a lot of credence in the decisions that are being made about goals and objectives so it is important that we get information we can use from the survey questions. He feels the questions from *On the Table* and Commerce Lexington can be different because it is two different audiences. He has confidence that the Planning staff will distill the information in a way that is going to be functional in our process when it comes to goals and objectives. He and Director Duncan discussed how the information will be used in the process and Duncan said they are looking forward to getting the information from Commerce Lexington and *On the Table*. He noted this is "an" input, but it is not "the" input. It will be public, shared, and used to inform decisions - along with data, population, and demographics, and best practices from other communities. J. Brown asked if *Imagine Lexington* (the input tool) was a thing of the past. Duncan said that is just the name of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan and it is the plan they are building on. In addition to information that will be collected from *On the Table* and Commerce Lexington, J. Brown asked what other opportunities will be available for people to provide input for the Comprehensive Plan. Duncan said they will schedule times for individuals and other interested parties to talk directly with Planning staff. J. Brown requested *On the Table* distill the questions for more useful information, such as how to protect the environment.

III. Items Referred to Committee

No comment or action was taken on this item.

Motion by Bledsoe to adjourn at 2:43 p.m. Seconded by Baxter. Motion passed without dissent.