

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR:

A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

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by

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Abstract
of
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For this thesis, I seek to determine if there is a relationship between the normative theory and practical implementation of strategic planning among public sector organizations in California. There is little empirical evidence testing a set of criteria for a “model” strategic plan. To address this gap, I conducted a review of the current public sector strategic planning literature and identified four critical elements that the normative literature suggests should be present in a strategic plan. The four normative tenets of strategic planning from the literature that are used in an empirical study conducted in Milwaukee (Hendrick, 2003) are: the organization’s acknowledgement of key environmental variables, documented evidence of goals and outcomes, use of qualitative and quantitative performance metrics to measure progress, and use of feedback loops to inform iterative strategic plan modification and evolution. I use a qualitative evaluation system to determine if the content of three strategic plans contains the four major themes from the normative literature. My goal is twofold: 1. Search for evidence of the four thematic content items in each city’s strategic plan, and 2. Determine whether or not each public organization uses its strategic plan to guide decision making. Additionally, I

evaluated key municipal documents to determine if the strategic plans are fully, partially, or not integrated into each public organization. My results indicate that two cities' strategic plans contain all four normative criteria; only one of the three cities uses its strategic plan to guide decision-making. Furthermore, one city's plan is fully integrated, the other is partially integrated, and the third is not integrated into their respective organizations. I also found that the impact of a strategic plan is mitigated by its connection to fiscal resources, more specifically, a municipal budget. Finally, I discuss the implications of my conclusions for the future of public sector strategic planning.

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Chapter 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO STRATEGIC PLANNING

In this thesis, I seek to determine if there is a relationship between the normative theory and practical implementation of strategic planning among public sector organizations in California. Most case study research focuses either on the strategic plan development process or on key stakeholders' level of satisfaction with the strategic planning process. Little empirical evidence defines a set of criteria and evaluates the strategic plan document's content to determine if the criteria are present. I evaluated the content of three strategic plans that utilize key public engagement methods in their development process. My content analysis tests best practice criteria used in an empirical study in Milwaukee. The normative literature supports the criteria used in the Milwaukee study.

Problem

A strategic plan combines various organizational goals to accomplish a specific mission. In his seminal piece on public sector strategic planning, Bryson (2004) submits that public sector strategic planning in the United States 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" (p. 6). However, the concern within the literature is that public sector strategic plans are not actually strategic (Bryson, Berry, & Yang, 2010; Mintzberg, 1994; Poister, Pitts, & Hamilton Edwards, 2010). Limited empirical evidence supports the critique that a strategic plan actually affects what an organization is, what it

does, and why it does it. Likewise, there are few examples of what a “successful” strategic plan looks like in practice based on a set of tangible criteria.

Purpose

Poister and Streib (2005) argue that organizational decision makers do not fully integrate the strategic plan across the entire organization to facilitate plan implementation. In other words, public sector organizations create strategic plans, but fail to use the strategic plan document to implement strategic initiatives. To test this assertion, I conduct a review of the strategic planning literature and identify four normative strategic plan criteria. I derive my criteria from the literature and an empirical study conducted in Milwaukee (Hendrick, 2003). The four normative criteria are: the organization’s acknowledgement of key process and environmental variables, documented evidence of goals and outcomes, use of qualitative and quantitative performance metrics to measure progress, and use of feedback loops to inform iterative strategic plan modification and evolution. My goal is twofold: 1. Search for evidence of the four criteria in each city’s strategic plan and 2. Determine whether or not each public organization uses its strategic plan to implement its documented strategic initiatives. Additionally, I evaluated key municipal documents to determine if the strategic plans are fully, partially, or not integrated into each public organization.

The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 is a review of the seminal works on public sector strategic planning and is organized according to my four normative criteria. In Chapter 3, I outline the qualitative questions I ask as part of my

analysis, and discuss how I chose each case study. I also introduce the criteria I use to determine if the strategic plan is fully, partially, or not integrated into each organization. I also provide a table that aligns my criteria to the normative literature. In Chapter 4, I document my four normative criteria findings in the comprehensive strategic plans from the cities of El Cerrito, Monrovia, and Richmond, California. Finally, in Chapter 5, I evaluate whether or not each city uses its strategic plan to guide what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it. I conclude with a discussion of my strategic plan integration findings, lessons learned from my analysis, and recommendations for future public sector strategic planners and practitioners.

Chapter 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this literature review, I provide an overview of the major works relevant to public sector strategic planning and establish a baseline understanding of key concepts. I omitted literature about nonprofit and private-public collaborations because public sector organizations are distinct from other organizations. The public sector strategic planning movement is rooted in private sector business model logic which links profit maximization techniques to operational streamlining, organizational efficiency, and optimal resource allocation. However, public organizations do not engage in strategic planning to maximize profits. Public organizations in the United States enhance life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness through the delivery of public goods and services to the public. The context, mission, and scope of each public organization further narrow this lofty and intangible mission.

A Working Definition of Strategic Planning

In his seminal piece on public sector strategic planning, Bryson (2004) submits that public sector strategic planning in the United States 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” (p. 6). Bryson asserts that the purpose of any strategic plan is to ensure a public agency’s ability to add public value, which is the key aspect that differentiates public from private sector and nonprofit organizations. Pursuit of this overarching goal encourages public organizations to prioritize their activities, needs, and

goals differently than their for-profit counterparts. Therefore, strategic plans articulate the organization's mission (what it is and why it does it) and describe tangible activities that support goal accomplishment (what it does). In this regard, strategic plans are creative, innovative, and analytical "big picture" documents that frame a public agency's current context and chart a course for its future direction. Bryson et al. (2010) suggest that once the organization defines what it is, what it does, and why it does it, the strategic plan can be implemented to add public value. Normative theory also encourages organizations to document goals and objectives, use performance metrics to record accomplishments and shortcomings, and use feedback loop data to modify the strategic plan. This iterative quality allows decision makers to learn, modify, and evolve the document to benefit future versions of the strategic plan.

Process Variables

The normative literature explains each public organization's contextual reality can affect the development process and content of a strategic plan. Context can influence process decisions including whether a public organization adopts short-term, incremental approaches or a long-range strategic plan. Hendrick's (2003) empirical study in Milwaukee provides several examples of process variables for public organizations to consider. For example, *Comprehensiveness* describes the depth of an organization's problem and solution identification process and the number of organizational functions, departments, and agencies considered. This variable may also consider whether the organization adopts an incremental versus long-term strategic plan. Finally,

comprehensiveness describes the structure and rigidity of the process used to develop the strategic plan. *Centralization and Exclusion, Delegation and Inclusion, and Activation and Involvement of External Stakeholders* is a process variable that describes the level of external stakeholder influence on the organization's strategic planning process. Decision makers can ask the following questions to gauge the extent of external stakeholder involvement: Are there any stakeholders not employed by our organization? If so, who are they? Should external stakeholders be involved in the strategic planning process to generate policies, create programs, or deliver services? Should external stakeholders evaluate and choose the organization's strategic proposals? How does our organization manage external stakeholder influence (i.e., delegate authority, grant decision making power versus advisory capacity only, power sharing mechanisms, bargaining processes)?

The Institute for Local Government (ILG) is a non-profit organization that encourages decision makers to include external stakeholders in the strategic plan development process. The ILG is widely recognized as a leading authority on practical, impartial, and easy-to-use resources for local governments. Public officials nationwide can reference the ILG website to discover new ideas and develop best practices associated with successful governance, including strategic planning. The ILG developed 10 Principles of Local Government Public Engagement to help public officials solicit input and feedback from their external stakeholder communities. The ILG 10 principles encourage decision makers to use community feedback as a mechanism to identify organizational context that informs strategic plan content. The ILG has an online

database highlighting public organizations in California that conducted model public outreach campaigns and then used that feedback to develop a strategic plan.

Environmental Variables

Normative theory suggests that decision makers and stakeholders develop an intimate, nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of their organization and its environment. Environmental variable identification can help decision makers better understand their organizations and frame context-specific realities that can affect strategic plan content. Furthermore, the literature suggests that there is no singular best approach to identify environmental variables (Cal ILG, 2000; California State Department of Finance, 1998; Mosaica, 2001; National Civic League, 2000; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). One way organizations identify environmental variables is by conducting an environmental scan, often called a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. An environmental scan can help decision makers understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the organization's public service role (what it is) and responsibilities (what it does).

An in-depth, organization-wide environmental contextual analysis brings key organizational issues and problems to the surface. Hendrick (2010) provides examples of *internal* environmental variables including human resources, staff time, money, structural and bureaucratic complexity, and organizational buy-in and dedication to strategic planning. She acknowledges that each organization's environment is different and that not every variable is readily identifiable. However, any of these environmental variables

can influence the strategic plan's content. The environmental scan may also suggest that strategic planning is not the most contextually appropriate approach. Hendrick encourages leaders and decision makers to consider the following environment related questions:

- Is your organization too comfortable? Or too stressed?
- Are you currently experiencing too much change?
- Does your organization lack a champion with decision-making authority who will actively pursue the strategic planning process?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” she asserts that strategic planning may be counterproductive for the organization and do more harm than good.

Hendrick (2003) goes on to explain that *external* environmental variables can include the political positioning of external stakeholders and interactions with and interdependence between organizations. Public sector experts and strategic planning models alike (Mosaica, 2001; Nutt & Backoff, 1995; Rainey, 2009) support Hendrick's assertion and highlight the importance of decision makers' familiarity with environmental variables that can influence a strategic plan. Broad categories of external environmental variables include technological, political, legal, economic, demographic, ecological, and cultural conditions (Rainey, 2009). Budgeting mechanisms, competing priorities, wavering public opinion, election cycles, and political appointee systems are additional external environmental variables that can influence an organization's size, scope, purpose and strategic plan. Rainey (2009) argues that these variables create public sector

decision-making environments that are complex and much less systematic and rational. Like Bryson et al. (2010), Hendrick (2010) warns public organizations not to underestimate the external environmental variables that can cause an organization, and its strategic plan, to change.

Finally, Poister (2010) suggests that certain internal environment variables can mitigate the effects of uncontrollable external variables. He explains that the most recent economic recession caused turbulence and disjuncture for many public organizations when it changed what they did and how they did it. Poister suggests that an inclusive and nurturing internal environment fosters a shared sense of organizational belonging, ownership, and broad-based commitment among an organization's members. Leaders and decision makers can develop and leverage supportive internal environments to mitigate the effects of uncertainty and apprehension caused by change in the external environment. Poister also explains that intentionality is key as strategists ask introspective questions to uncover pressing issues that cause internal disjuncture and make organizations vulnerable to environmental change.

A thorough scan that captures internal and external environmental variables can help the organization better understand how environmental context influences change and impacts what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Goal and Outcome Development

Hendrick (2003) and others (Cohen 2010; Poister, 2010; Rumelt, 2011) highlight the importance of creating strategic plans with clear, measureable goals and outcomes.

Goals and outcomes are *Mid-Range* in nature with *Identifiable Beginning and End Points*, while tasks and activities describe “*How*” *Work is Conducted*. In other words, tasks and activities are the substantive, *Short-Term* stepping-stones that can help an organization achieve its mid-range goals and outcomes. Decision makers calculate and allocate human, capital, and temporal input resources to take an action. That action (or series of actions) can position the organization on course to accomplish a future goal or outcome. Resource constraints may indicate that a particular goal or objective must be satisfied before proceeding to a new goal, that certain goals or objectives are unnecessary, inappropriate, or unattainable, or that the best course of action is no action at all. Ultimately, organizations perform tasks and activities to achieve goals and outcomes, but the literature also emphasizes that goal and outcome development is only one aspect of the strategic plan.

Mintzberg (1994) asserts that a strategic plan is not a wish list of goals and outcomes. Like Hendrick (2003), Mintzberg explains that goals and outcomes have beginning and end points; once set, they require a simple, linear methodological problem-solving approach. The organization identifies a task, allocates resources to take action, and then assesses whether the goal or outcome was achieved. However, Mintzberg urges managers and executives not to fall into this linear goal-driven mindset when developing a strategic plan. Rumelt (2011) reiterates this point and explains that stretch goals, budgets, and endless organizational to do lists are not strategic plans. For Mintzberg and Rumelt, goals and outcomes can be practical, substantive, and productive, but are not

inherently strategic. The strategic plan is the creative, innovative, and analytical “big-picture” document that sets goals, evaluates outcomes, and develops alternative approaches to what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Rumelt (2011) also asserts that decision makers must be introspective and intentional and ask questions before setting goals and outcomes. Probing questions include: Are we the best organization to deliver certain services? Should we outsource certain tasks and activities? Do our goals fall outside our programmatic responsibilities or resource capacity? Can we leverage current activities to address future goals and outcomes? Do our goals and outcomes address ongoing needs or one-time fixes? Who will benefit and who will lose if we take certain actions? Mintzberg (1994) and Rumelt (2011) agree that these introspective and intentional questions can help decision makers develop strategic plans with goals and outcomes that are reasoned and informed.

Rumelt (2011) adds that reasoned and informed decision making can prevent leaders from creating lofty goals and outcomes driven by individual ambition. Both he and Bryson et al. (2010) agree that individual ambition adds little public value when it produces strategic plan goals and outcomes that are difficult to accomplish. Abdallah and Langley (2014) support this claim and explain that lofty goals and outcomes can encourage short-term, outside-the-box ideas that result in exploratory tasks and activities. However, task exploration and experimentation adds little public value over the long-term if they do not accomplish mid-range goals and outcomes.

Performance Metrics

Performance metrics measure what an organization does. The literature recommends that strategic plans include quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure task and activity performance as well as goal and objective progress. With the help of performance metrics decisions makers can assess the extent of an activity or goal's public value added. Hendrick's (2003) study finds that quantitative performance metrics can measure resource allocation, programmatic reach, budgetary spending, and fiscal reserves and savings. On the other hand, customer and stakeholder satisfaction is a qualitative metric. Hendrick asserts that qualitative and quantitative performance metrics act as mirrors to reflect the organization's work. They are strategic plan tools that can demonstrate to decision makers what is (or is not) being done in pursuit of the larger organizational vision.

However, Poister (2010) urges decision makers to exercise caution when developing strategic plan performance metrics. Poister references empirical cases from New Mexico's Department of Transportation and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to stress this assertion. In the 1990s, the New Mexico Department of Transportation developed performance metrics to demonstrate that it successfully built and maintained highways. Because the department's performance metrics indicated success, it committed a majority of its fiscal resources toward building and maintaining highways. However, the department did not develop metrics to account for shifts in statewide development patterns, transportation needs, and alternative mobility options.

Poister argues that the transportation department's failure to develop performance metrics that capture environmental changes resulted in a slow department response. He adds that this shortsightedness was especially costly when the department needed to shift its work away from building and maintaining highways.

Similarly, Poister argues that the Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) division of the CDC used inappropriate performance metrics to gauge grant-funding effectiveness. The division tried to incentivize state health departments to prevent the spread of syphilis and chlamydia and to reduce treatment costs. The annual number of additional syphilis and chlamydia cases treated by state would measure grant fund effectiveness. However, despite grant funding, the STD division reported that the annual number of syphilis and chlamydia cases treated by state was relatively static. Qualitative metrics helped the STD division realize that state health departments had little influence on statewide treatment center networks. As a result, state health departments could not encourage collaboration among treatment centers, reduce disease treatment costs, or treat additional syphilis and chlamydia cases. In both the New Mexico and CDC empirical cases, Poister argues that the performance metric scope was too narrow, which made them ineffective. To prevent performance metric scope issues in the future, he encourages decision makers to develop more comprehensive qualitative *and* quantitative metrics. Better data (and in some cases, more data) can be better indicators of what an organization does and how it is doing.

Finally, Cohen (2010) offers another perspective on problematic performance metrics. She encourages public organizations to make clear distinctions between task

measurements and the broader organizational mission or vision. In other words, the vision and mission drive organizational tasks and activities, but not vice versa. For Cohen, performance metrics are informative tools that decision makers can use to evolve a strategic plan so that it remains consistent with the broader vision. In this regard, the normative literature encourages decision makers to use performance metrics pragmatically.

Plan Modification and Evolution

Bryson (2004) asserts that following an implementation phase, the strategic plan can be modified and evolved. He explains that decision makers can assess the plan's successes, shortcomings, strengths, and weaknesses using various information-gathering methods. Examples include periodic studies, reports, conferences, hearings, fact-finding missions, on-site observations, and discussions with stakeholders. The feedback generated from these activities can inform decision makers about which plan elements to maintain, replace, or terminate.

Hendrick (2003) also encourages decision makers to develop feedback loops that inform strategic plan *Evaluation and Modification*. Examples of feedback loops include periodic check-in requirements, community engagement practices, public open forums, strategic plan meeting notes, or a budgetary mechanism. The performance metrics discussed above can also inform decision makers how to modify short-term tasks and activities to meet mid-range goals and objectives. Similarly, decision makers can analyze mid-range goal and objective accomplishment to assess if the plan satisfies the

organization's long-term vision. In both instances, quantitative and qualitative performance metric data can feed feedback loops. The feedback loop can then allow decision makers to address new organizational challenges, reassess resource allocations, and modify the strategic plan as necessary. Ultimately, both Bryson (2004) and Hendrick (2010) agree that what a public organization is, what it does, and why it does it changes over time. As a result, they assert that decision makers must be open to new ideas in order to learn and adapt the strategic plan.

Graetz (2002) explains that "organizational cognizance" is a qualitative form of organizational learning that can feed a feedback loop. She describes organizational cognizance as a form of emotional intelligence; it is the internal temperature gauge that indicates the organization's positioning, context, and environment. Graetz believes that if decision makers lack emotional intelligence they may fall out of touch with the organization. This disconnect can cause decision makers to adapt the strategic plan's content in ways that move the organization away from its long-term vision. Cohen (2010) supports Graetz's organizational cognizance discussion and explains that "good ideas" for the strategic plan can originate from any level of the organization. She encourages organizations to develop feedback loops that solicit information from line staff and other non-management level stakeholders. Graetz and Cohen argue that an incomplete feedback loop neglects information from non-traditional organizational sources. In other words, qualitative feedback loops can be valuable if they help decision makers stay in touch with what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Finally, Mintzberg (1994) adds that feedback loops can be enhanced with open lines of communication. He asserts that open communication with internal stakeholders can reveal pockets of organizational dysfunction. Dysfunction can impede an organization's operations and be counterproductive to the strategic plan. Poister (2010) agrees and challenges public agencies to enhance feedback loops with qualitative "soft" data. He explains that soft data can signal opportunities for organizational improvement or internal weaknesses that pose immediate organizational threats. In sum, the literature encourages decision makers to balance qualitative and quantitative feedback loops. In doing so, decision makers can modify and evolve the strategic plan so it remains contextually relevant and appropriately reflects what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Ideally, I would randomly select a series of public sector strategic plans to evaluate from a central list, but unfortunately no such resource exists. What is readily available is the Institute for Local Government's (ILG) "Public Engagement Case Story" database (<http://www.ca-ilg.org/>). The database identifies California cities that used ILG's 10 "Principles of Local Government Public Engagement" to conduct public engagement initiatives. The ILG principles can help public officials facilitate public engagement initiatives, and allow them to make more informed decisions for their communities. The 10 "Principles of Local Government Public Engagement" are:

1. Inclusive Planning
2. Transparency
3. Authentic Intent
4. Breadth of Participation
5. Informed Participation
6. Accessible Participation
7. Appropriate Process
8. Authentic Use of Information Received
9. Feedback to Participants
10. Evaluation

Many of the ILG principles above link to the strategic plan development process, and reinforce the four normative themes in the literature. These qualities make the ILG database an ideal starting point in the search for strategic plans. Table 1 illustrates the alignment of ILG's Principles and the four normative themes.

Table 1

ILG Principles Aligned with Major Themes from the Literature

Major Thematic Area	Normative Literature	ILG Supporting Principle
<i>Process Variables</i>	Bryson, 2004; California State Department of Finance, 1998; Hendrick, 2003, 2010; ILG, 2015; Mosaica, 2001; National Civic League, 2000; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004	1. Inclusive Planning; 3. Authentic Intent; 5. Informed Participation; 7. Appropriate Process; 9. Feedback to Participants; 10. Evaluation
<i>Environmental Variables</i>	Bryson et al., 2010; California State Department of Finance, 1998; Hendrick, 2003, 2010; ILG, 2000; Mosaica, 2001; National Civic League, 2000; Nutt & Backoff, 1995; Poister, 2010, Rainey, 2009; W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004	1. Inclusive Planning; 3. Authentic Intent; 5. Informed Participation; 7. Appropriate Process; 9. Feedback to Participants; 10. Evaluation
<i>Goals & Outcomes</i>	Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Bryson et al., 2010; Cohen, 2010; Hendrick, 2003; Mintzberg, 1994; Poister, 2010; Rumelt, 2011	3. Authentic Intent; 4. Breadth of Participation 5. Informed Participation; 7. Appropriate Process; 8. Authentic Use of Information Received; 9. Feedback to Participants; 10. Evaluation
<i>Metrics & Performance Indicators</i>	Bryson, 2004; Cohen, 2010; Hendrick, 2003; Poister, 2010	2. Transparency; 5. Informed Participation

Table 1 (continued)

Major Thematic Area	Normative Literature	ILG Supporting Principle
<i>Plan Modification & Evolution</i>	Bryson, 2004; Cohen, 2010; Graetz, 2002; Hendrick, 2003, 2010; Mintzberg, 1994; Poister, 2010	1. Inclusive Planning; 2. Transparency; 3. Authentic Intent; 5. Informed Participation; 7. Appropriate Process; 9. Feedback to Participants; 10. Evaluation

I conducted a “comprehensive strategic planning” keyword search in the ILG database, and found three California cities that used a public engagement process to create a comprehensive city-wide strategic plan: El Cerrito, Monrovia, and Richmond. Once I identified El Cerrito, Monrovia, and Richmond, I visited each city’s website and searched for their comprehensive strategic plans. All three plans are published online, available to the public, and have a distinct organizational purpose and mission. Herein, I refer to these three strategic plans as “case studies” to distinguish them from the other case stories in the ILG database.

Hendrick (2003) explains that comprehensive strategic plans should recognize, acknowledge, and focus their content on four critical categories:

1. Identification of key **Environmental** and **Process** variables;
2. Linkages between **Organizational Goals or Outcomes** and environmental/process variables;
3. Use of **Metrics Systems and Performance Indicators** to measure goal and outcome achievement; and finally
4. Development of **Feedback loop mechanisms** that advise strategic plan modification and evolution.

By ILG public engagement process standards, El Cerrito, Monrovia, and Richmond conducted model public engagement processes to inform the development of their comprehensive strategic plan. Given that ILG prescreens for inclusionary stakeholder engagement processes for strategic plan development, I exclude process variables from my analysis. However, I will be searching for examples of the remaining normative strategic planning themes (Environmental Variables, Goals and Outcomes, Performance Metrics, and Plan Modification and Evolution) in each of my case studies.

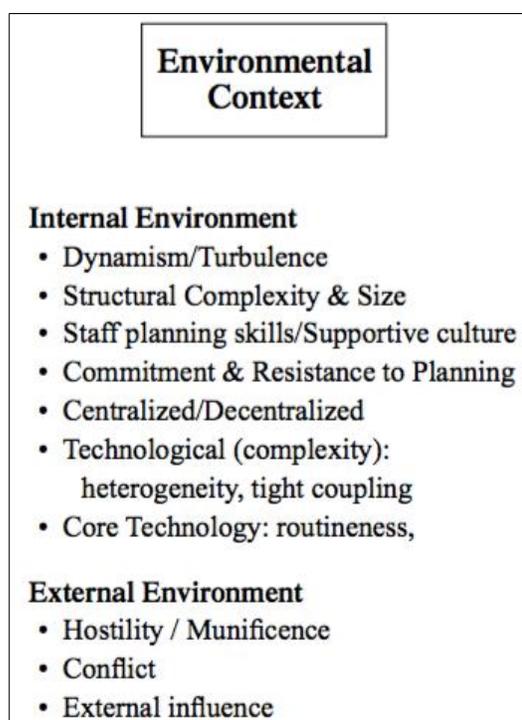


Figure 1. Elements of strategic plan environmental variables.

If these three case studies meet normative expectations from the literature, but fail to demonstrate evidence of implementation, then perhaps creating a strategic plan is much easier than implementing one.

Building upon the normative literature and Hendrick's (2003) empirical study, I segment environmental variables into two major categories: Internal and External.

Figure 1, adapted from Hendrick (2003), lists the subcategories for both Internal and

External Environmental variables. Each bullet

point represents a separate subcategory that I screen for in my analysis. All major

categories are divided into subcategories and there are 12 subcategories in total. I then

qualitatively identify each subcategory based on a series of questions. To assess whether each city implements and actually uses its strategic plan, I ask a series of integration related questions. Integration questions are listed in a separate category.

Environmental Variables

Hendrick (2003) explains that certain internal environmental variables are common to all organizations. Looking at each strategic plan's content, I ask the questions in Table 2.

Table 2

Internal Environmental Variable Questions

Subcategories	Questions
<i>Structural Complexity and Size</i>	Is there an organizational chart?
	Are all municipal departments, programs, and services offered listed?
	Does the plan acknowledge the positions and roles of organizational stakeholders?
<i>Staff Skills</i>	Does the plan identify staff skillsets?
	Does the plan identify known knowledge gaps?
	Does the plan outsource certain organizational tasks or duties?
	Does the plan demonstrate general knowledge of cause and effect relationships, monitoring, and forecasting?

Table 2 (continued)

Subcategories	Questions
<i>Supportive Culture and Commitment/Resistance to Planning</i>	<p>Is there evidence of non-monetary support for the strategic plan?</p> <p>Is there evidence that decision makers are open to new ideas?</p> <p>Who has decision-making authority?</p>
<i>Centralization/Decentralization</i>	<p>What are the professional titles of the individuals with decision-making authority?</p> <p>Do decision makers have formal or informal organizational roles?</p> <p>Is decision making inclusive (bottom-up) or exclusive (top-down)?</p>
<i>Technological Complexity</i>	<p>Does the organization acknowledge its mission or vision?</p> <p>Does the breadth of the plan include all municipal programs and services or a select few?</p> <p>Does the plan acknowledge and utilize shared service partnerships to accomplish objectives?</p>
<i>Core Technology</i>	<p>Which tangible tools does the organization use to engage in strategy development?</p> <p>Does the plan reference supplemental documents, forms, diagrams, or other written plans?</p> <p>Do these tangible tools help the organization standardize, structure, and routinize its work or other organizational processes?</p>

Table 3

External Environmental Variable Questions

Subcategories	Questions
<i>Hostility/Benevolence</i>	Does the plan acknowledge competitive pressures (i.e., resource limitations, unfavorable economic conditions, competing governments, undesirable media attention, or other extenuating political and social conditions)?
<i>Conflict</i>	<p>What is the nature of the relationship between the organization and external stakeholders?</p> <p>Do external stakeholders agree or disagree with the organization's stated mission and objectives?</p> <p>Does the organization choose to avoid or leverage conflict?</p>
<i>External Influence</i>	<p>Does conflict affect the organization's pursuit of its broader vision and mission?</p> <p>Does the organization operate with relative autonomy from oversight bodies or authority figures?</p> <p>Who develops the organization's objectives and overall mission?</p> <p>Who decides which programs and services the organization will deliver?</p> <p>Who decides appropriate workload levels?</p> <p>Who decides appropriate service standards?</p>

Identifying Goals and Outcomes

Hendrick (2003) and others (Cohen, 2010; Poister, 2010; Rumelt, 2011) highlight the importance of creating strategic plans with clear, measureable goals and outcomes.

To identify and evaluate goals and outcomes, I ask the series of questions in Table 4.

Table 4

Goals and Outcomes Questions

Subcategories	Questions
<i>Short-Term and Mid-Range</i>	Does the plan identify specific short-term tasks and activities?
	Does the plan identify specific mid-range goals and objectives?
<i>“How” Work is Conducted</i>	Does the plan allocate organizational resources (i.e., quantity of human, capital, and temporal inputs) to complete a task or activity?
	Are short-term tasks and activities linked to mid-range goals and objectives?
	Does the plan indicate progressive steps to achieve goals and objectives (i.e., that a particular goal or objective must be satisfied before proceeding to a new one)?
	Does the plan acknowledge goals or objectives that are unnecessary, inappropriate, or unattainable?
	Does the plan suggest that the best course of action is no action at all?
<i>Identifiable Beginning and End Points</i>	Are there time limits or other temporal restrictions for short-term tasks and activities?
	Are there time limits or other temporal restrictions for mid-range goals and objectives?

Identifying Performance Metrics

Hendrick (2003) asserts that qualitative and quantitative performance metrics act as mirrors to reflect the organization's work. These tools demonstrate to decision makers what is (or is not) being done in pursuit of the larger organizational vision. To identify Performance Metrics, I ask the series of questions in Table 5.

Table 5

Performance Metrics Questions

Category	Questions
<i>Performance Metrics</i>	<p>Does the plan contain quantitative performance metrics (i.e., resource allocation, programmatic reach, budgetary spending, and fiscal reserves and savings)?</p> <p>Does the plan contain qualitative performance metrics (i.e., customer and stakeholder satisfaction)?</p> <p>Do performance metrics measure what the organization actually does?</p> <p>Does the plan measure task and activity performance and goal and objective progress?</p> <p>Are there performance metrics that indicate program efficiency and effectiveness?</p> <p>Do metrics systems indicate the extent of an activity or goal's public value added?</p>

Identifying Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms

The literature provides examples of different types of strategic plan Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms (Bryson, 2004; Cohen, 2010; Graetz, 2002; Hendrick, 2003).

To identify Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms, I ask the series of questions in

Table 6.

Table 6

Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms Questions

Category	Questions
<i>Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms</i>	<p>Does the plan contain Periodic Check-ins/Reporting Requirements?</p> <p>Does the plan document contain Qualitative/Quantitative Feedback Loops (i.e., periodic studies, reports, conferences, hearings, fact-finding missions, on-site observations, check-in requirements, strategic plan meeting notes, budgetary mechanisms, or discussions with stakeholders)?</p> <p>Does the plan document Community Engagement Practices (i.e., public open forums, Town Hall Meetings, “Street Corner” Engagement, Office Hours, Online/Mailer surveys)?</p> <p>Does the plan utilize tools or mechanisms to gather information about the plan’s successes, shortcomings, strengths, and weaknesses?</p> <p>Do feedback loops inform decision makers about which plan elements to maintain, replace, or terminate?</p> <p>Do feedback loops prompt decision makers to address new organizational challenges, reassess resource allocations, or otherwise modify the strategic plan?</p> <p>Does the plan indicate that decision makers are open to learning?</p> <p>Does the plan indicate that decision makers are accepting of new ideas?</p> <p>Does the plan indicate that decision makers are cognizant of the organization’s positioning, context, and environment?</p>

Strategic Plan Integration

California State Law requires all cities to develop a long-range general plan that addresses land use, circulation (i.e., transportation), housing, conservation, open-space, noise, and safety. Given this mandate, I anticipate there are varying degrees of strategic plan integration into these key documents. To test this theory and the assertion that there is an empirical gap in the normative literature (Bryson, 2004, 2010; Bryson et al., 2010; Hendrick, 2003, 2010; Poister et al., 2010; Poister & Streib, 2005), I look at possible supporting documents including a General Plan, fiscal year budget, capital improvement plan, work plans, a score card, and financial plan, and ask the integration-related questions in Table 7.

Table 7

Integration Questions

Category	Questions
<i>Integration</i>	<p>Does the organization fully integrate the strategic plan (i.e., linked to a General Plan, fiscal year budget, financial plan, capital improvement plan, <u>and</u> other strategic plan supporting documents)?</p> <p>Is the organization moving toward strategic plan integration (i.e., linked to <u>one</u> of the municipal documents listed above)?</p> <p>Does the organization not integrate its strategic plan (i.e., <u>not</u> linked to any of the municipal documents listed above)?</p>

My qualitative assessment approach calls for an analysis of each strategic plan's content. It relies upon my own assessment, which is informed by normative advice from the literature and the subcategory content questions listed above. This approach may not capture informal evidence of the four major categories or the 12 subcategories. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I only evaluate subcategories that are present and readily distinguishable in the strategic plan, its supporting documents, or the other municipal documents listed above.

This approach is an inexpensive qualitative evaluation tool that asks pointed questions about strategic plan content using a set of normative criteria. My approach also offers a practical means for public sector decision makers and organization members to become involved and actively engaged in strategic planning. Future studies will benefit from qualitative in-depth interviews with decision makers and key organizational stakeholders that provide additional insight about the strategic plan. Ideally, my case study assessment approach generates further discussion about strategic plan evaluation mechanisms and other ways to assess empirical examples of strategic plan content, implementation, and integration in the public sector.

There are limitations to this approach, namely that it is a big-picture assessment of three case studies. Additionally, the approach may exclude important documents or other nuances not reflected in written documents. Examples include non-published environmental scan documents (i.e., SWOT analyses, internal memoranda), informal email correspondences, hard copy documents, and verbal discussions between

stakeholders behind closed doors. To expand the scope of this thesis in the future, I would consider looking at additional case studies, conducting key stakeholder interviews, and distributing surveys within each organization. Additional qualitative and quantitative data not considered here may speak to the organization's practical interactions with and candid opinions about the strategic plan.

Chapter 4

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

El Cerrito

<i>El Cerrito</i>	<i>Vision: The City of El Cerrito is a safe, connected, transit-oriented and environmentally focused destination with welcoming neighborhoods, thriving businesses and vibrant public spaces, and diverse cultural, educational and recreational opportunities for people of all ages.</i>
<i>Population: 23,549</i>	
<i>Median Income: \$85,481</i>	
<i>Land Area: 3.69 sq. mi.</i>	
<i>Contra Costa County</i>	<i>Mission: The City of El Cerrito serves, leads and supports our diverse and transit-rich community by providing exemplary and innovative services, public places and infrastructure, ensuring public safety, and creating an economically and environmentally sustainable future.</i>
<i>(U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)</i>	

City Values – Ethics and Integrity, Fiscal Responsibility, Inclusiveness and Respect for Diversity, Innovation and Creativity, Professional Excellence, Responsiveness, Transparency and Open Communication, Sustainability

*City Goals – A: Deliver exemplary government services
 B: Achieve long-term fiscal sustainability
 C: Deepen a sense of place and community identity
 D: Develop and rehabilitate public facilities as community focal points
 E: Ensure the public's health and safety
 F: Foster environmental sustainability citywide
 (City of El Cerrito, n.d., para. 4-7)*

The City of El Cerrito is located in the northern California county of Contra Costa in what is commonly referred to as the East Bay. In June 2012, the city outsourced strategic plan development and consulting services to Management Partners, a third party, private organization with offices in California and Ohio. The 18-page document titled *El Cerrito Strategic Plan 2015 to 2020* is the most current version of El Cerrito's

five-year strategic plan, and can be found online on the city's official strategic plan website (<http://www.el-cerrito.org/index.aspx?nid=747>).

Internal Environmental Variables

El Cerrito's strategic plan does not account for the following key internal environmental variables: Structural Complexity and Size, Staff Skills, Technological Complexity, and Core Technology. This document does not clearly acknowledge the organizational elements of size, number or services delivered, planning ability and skillsets of its members, and other tangible tools the city will use to routinize strategic development processes. It is possible that an environmental scan document like a SWOT exists, but I was unable to find it on the city's website. In terms of Core Technology, the plan references use of Implementation Action Plans (IAPs), a supplementary "blueprint" document that operationalizes the strategic plan. An IAP identifies specific timelines, assignments, and the resource allocations El Cerrito needs to accomplish its stated goals and objectives. Unfortunately, examples of IAPs are not attached to the strategic plan nor are they publically available on the city's website.

Despite these shortcomings, it appears the city obtained internal buy-in to its strategic plan and is developing Supportive Culture and Commitment around strategic planning activities. The "Our Values" section of the plan lists the city's core principles and describes the types of behavior the city as a whole will adopt to carry out its work. Highlights include El Cerrito's commitment to modeling inclusive behavior, recognizing the value of "emotional intelligence," embracing a spirit of openness to new ideas, and

creating an atmosphere where making and learning from mistakes is critical to the organization's overall success. El Cerrito's approach to strategic planning with respect to plan content and decision making is exclusive and Centralized because it is driven by the City Council and Executive team members. However, the list of core values is an inclusive approach that elicits broad-based buy-in from the entire organization. Transparent intent demonstrates that while centralized, El Cerrito is committed to building trust in government.

External Environmental Variables

El Cerrito's strategic plan does not contain evidence of consideration for external Hostility or, alternatively, Benevolence factors. The plan does not discuss the city's approach to managing finite resource limitations; shifts in the state, national, or global economies; or competing government priorities. "Goal B" of the strategic plan to achieve long-term financial sustainability is a nod to planning for some external environmental factors, but the goal's sub-bullets fail to flesh out the city's concrete strategies and procedures.

The city's closest external stakeholder group is the public. Evidence in the strategic plan suggests that over the past three years, the city developed positive relationships via public outreach campaigns. The potential for Conflict to arise is ever-present but mitigated by the city's commitment to public outreach activities. Relationship maintenance is evident in "Goal A: Deliver exemplary government services" where the city explains it will develop and strengthen relationships with

residents, businesses, schools, and community groups. The organization's attentiveness to the opinions and needs of the public builds positive relationships that create the foundation for strategic plan acceptability.

All strategic plan document content suggests that External Influence is not a factor in the development and execution of El Cerrito's strategic plan. As previously discussed, the City Council and Executive team possess the central authority to independently develop the overall mission, vision, and strategic objectives. These two groups are accountable for the plan's content and for monitoring its successes and shortcomings. In addition to internal staff input, external public input is solicited to provide clarity and direction for decision makers. Ultimately, however, the city assumes responsibility for deciding which services it will deliver as well as appropriate workload levels and service standards. It is unclear what direct or indirect effects external organizations will have upon El Cerrito's strategic plan development in the future. Likewise, the city does not present procedural steps to manage or mitigate external influence.

Goals and Outcomes Variables

Attachment B of the strategic plan defines goals as "up on the balcony" high-level views of opportunities for organizational change and improvement. Strategies, on the other hand, are the means to achieve organizational goals. For El Cerrito, goals and strategies are intentionally lofty because they provide broad context for the specific actions and steps the city takes to achieve its mission and vision. All of El Cerrito's

“Goals and Strategies” have a multi-year timeframe deadline and should be accomplished by 2025. This 10-year timespan covers both Short-term and Mid-Range requirements, and I can reasonably assume the city will accomplish some of its goals within the immediate short-term.

However, the goals and strategies in this strategic plan lack Identifiable Beginning and End Points. Furthermore, the timeframe for 10-year goals extends beyond the stated five-year lifespan of El Cerrito’s strategic plan document. There is no evidence to suggest how the city will manage shifts in priorities that may occur over the next decade, let alone the next five years. Finally, descriptions of “How” Work is Conducted is also missing from this document. Although El Cerrito commits itself to innovative and creative thinking, data-driven analysis, and economic forecasting to ensure appropriate resource allocation, these are broad statements about how the city will engage in its short-term and mid-range activities. There is little content identifying specific actions the city will take to achieve its stated goals and what it takes to actually conduct its work. It appears El Cerrito blurred the lines of “what” it plans to do with specific examples of activities that tangibly explain “how” it will do it.

Metrics and Performance Indicators

El Cerrito’s strategic plan does not contain Metrics and Performance Indicators. Performance metrics may appear elsewhere in official city documents, but there is no reference to them in the strategic plan. The plan acknowledges the city’s commitment to

data-driven analysis, but there is no other mention of metrics outside of this broad statement.

Plan Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms

The strategic plan recommends that the City Council conduct Periodic Check-ins every three to five years to review all goals and strategies, but there are no strategic process considerations for this recommended review cycle. I would expect the organization to consider specific metrics analyses including baseline resource allocations and pre- and post-treatment goal and outcome data. Perhaps this content is available in the IAP, but at present this remains an unknown because there are no sample IAP documents. I presume there will be various forms of Qualitative and Quantitative Feedback Loops, especially because the strategic plan states that the city will solicit input from the public and City employees. But again, this strategic plan does not outline what the city will actually do to demonstrate that it values inclusivity and is open to new ideas. The strategic plan remains open to interpretation by neglecting to state what specific actions the city will take to exemplify this value.

Finally, the current version of the strategic plan was developed after three years of internal and external Community Engagement Practices. The city held an open house event at City Hall, conducted an online survey and targeted stakeholder focus groups, and hosted various other community outreach events. The strategic plan states that the city will continue to engage public and private stakeholders in the future. However, in

addition to the absence of feedback loops, there is no stated plan to engage stakeholders in a way that informs future modifications and ongoing evaluation of the strategic plan.

Strategic Plan Integration

El Cerrito states that this strategic plan is its central reference guide. In addition, the city states that the plan is a framework for linking city priorities to its budget process, capital improvement program, important policy considerations, economic development initiatives, and the city's desire for continuous improvement. El Cerrito's biennial budget (City of El Cerrito, 2014) links revenues and expenditures to specific municipal department activities. The budget provides a color-coded description of exactly how specific departmental programs or services are aligned to the strategic plan, including funding mechanisms, goals and outcomes, and implementation status (i.e., "Ongoing," "Multi-Year," or "One-Time" status). The budget also contains detailed narrative descriptions and organizational charts for each city department and division, performance metrics and previous fiscal year accomplishments by department and division, and previous and current fiscal year resource allocations for each department and division. Based on content of the biennial budget, the strategic plan is integrated into El Cerrito's budget but not integrated into other key documents like the General Plan .

El Cerrito's General Plan does not clearly align to the strategic plan; however, one General Plan aspect in particular is worth noting. Chapter Two, Section Three of the General Plan outlines the requirements for a "Strategic Action Plan" or SAP. The one- to two-page SAP briefs bear similarities to the tenets of strategic planning in the literature.

SAPs are iterative documents that “outline the actions, projects and programs the City and community will implement to achieve its desired vision” (City of El Cerrito, 1999, p. 2-1). Additionally, SAPs assign actions to specific internal stakeholders, specify reasonable time frames to complete each action, and identify funding sources to support each action.

Monrovia

Major City Goals

- I. *Economic Development*
- II. *Environmental Stewardship*
- III. *Historic Preservation*
- IV. *Infrastructure & Facility*
- V. *Maintenance*
- VI. *Long-Term Fiscal Responsibility*
- VII. *Public Safety*

Monrovia

Population: 36,590

Median Income: \$71,786

Land Area: 13.61 sq. mi.

Los Angeles County

(U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)

Other Important Objectives

Community Participation

Gold Line

Monrovia Area Partnership (MAP)

Quality Professional Staff

Youth and Senior Services

Regional Employee Group Negotiations

Planned Development (PD) Zone Review

Hillside Preserve and Management Plan

(City of Monrovia, 2013b, p. 6)

The City of Monrovia in Los Angeles County, California is situated at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains approximately 23 miles northeast of Los Angeles. In October 2012, the city began soliciting community input to develop a strategic plan with the help of Hampian, Statler and Multari (HSM) Consultants, a third-party private consulting firm. The final version of *Plan Monrovia* was formally adopted by the City Council on May 7, 2013 (City of Monrovia, 2013b). The 20-page document is the most current version of Monrovia's two fiscal-year strategic plan and is available online on the city's official strategic plan website

(<http://www.cityofmonrovia.org/citycouncil/page/final-monrovia-strategic-plan>).

Internal Environmental Variables

Plan Monrovia acknowledges organizational Structural Complexity and Size in a narrative format that demonstrates a thorough understanding of its 228 full-time employee workforce. The opening message of the strategic plan from the City Council provides quantitative measures of the city workforce's 2012 accomplishments. Examples include: Public Works Department replaced more than 17,000 square feet of sidewalks, Police department received nearly 25,000 calls for service, and Fire Department responded to nearly 3,500 calls for service with average response times under six minutes. The strategic plan also acknowledges the fact that the economic recession forced Monrovia to cut expenditures by \$2 million and reduce its workforce by 17% in 2008. This short, basic, quantitative narrative is not exhaustive, but adequately demonstrates that city leaders and decision makers are well aware of their responsibilities given factors of organizational size and structural complexity.

The city leveraged the Staff Planning Skills of the Monrovia Idea Team (MIT 9) workgroup to initiate an organization-wide environmental scan. The role of this interdepartmental workgroup was to identify and document services, programs, and projects the city is obligated to complete. Additionally, MIT 9 was tasked with conducting workshops for city employees to discuss their current challenges as well as accomplishments achieved during the previous five-year timespan. Over 120 city employees participated in the MIT 9 workshops, and the City Council used this data in combination with city budget forecasting tools to generate a basic understanding of the

state of the city. Robust public outreach campaigns were facilitated by the HSM Consultant group as opposed to city staff (City of Monrovia, 2013a). Thousands of individual external stakeholders and community groups responded to surveys that were subsequently compiled and analyzed by HSM. The reasoning behind this decision to outsource is unclear, but it is possible that outreach campaign scale, prior staff obligations, and time commitments were determining factors.

MIT 9 staff workshop feedback data are not available for review, but Monrovia's inclusive organizational outreach strategy likely contributed to an Internal Culture of Commitment to the strategic plan. In addition, Plan Monrovia references "The Vision," a five-year recurring economic development plan focused on the historic Old Town district. I conducted a high-level review of *The Vision 2015* (City of Monrovia, n.d.c) and found that this 20-page document details various strategic initiatives and implementation steps unified by four broad themes: land use planning, marketing and promotions, image and identity creation, and redevelopment activities. It is clear that *The Vision 2015* is a more narrowly focused version of *Plan Monrovia*, but the structure and layout of both documents is essentially identical. By engaging in smaller scale strategic economic development efforts, Monrovia's City Council has developed a context-specific, replicable framework for strategic planning. This experience lays the foundation for an internal culture that is familiar with and supports strategic planning. Monrovia's strategic planning decision-making authority is Centralized. City Council members consider community feedback, analyze fiscal forecasting data, and weigh their own individual

priorities before voting on which strategic initiatives to include in the final version of the strategic plan.

Technological Complexity factors are absent from the strategic plan, but Core Technology has a strong presence. Monrovia's "Work Plans" are supplementary reference documents that outline the breadth and tangible content of the city's seven Major City Goals (City of Monrovia, n.d.a). Each work plan is 5-12 pages in length and details the following information: "Actions & Tasks" required, "When" the task will be accomplished and an estimate of "How Much" it will cost, the "Lead Department or Division" responsible for the action or task, and, finally, the "Metric" used to measure progress. This document articulates exactly what the city plans to do to accomplish its major goals. Work is structured and routinized, and responsible parties roles are identified. The "Cheat Sheet" document is an abbreviated version of the "Work Plans" and offers internal and external stakeholders a high-level overview of the strategic plan's implementation progress. The "Cheat Sheet" and "Work Plans" are separate documents available on the official *Plan Monrovia* website (City of Monrovia, n.d.d).

External Environmental Variables

From the outset, *Plan Monrovia* immediately acknowledges its resource limitations. The Great Recession had significant negative economic impacts on Monrovia's ability to deliver public services. Decreased local sales tax revenues, rising public employee pension costs, and various unfunded federal mandates exacerbated poor economic conditions. City Manager Laurie Lile's opening message in *Plan Monrovia* is

a call to action imploring the City Council to “curb [community] expectations” by exercising fiscal restraint given external economic challenges (City of Monrovia, 2013c, para. 4). The individual themes that support Goals I and V are direct responses to Monrovia’s economic and fiscal concerns. Examples include building adequate reserves, investigating new sources of city tax revenue, identifying workflow needs and redundancies, and creating favorable conditions to attract new businesses and support existing ones.

Conflict between external stakeholders and the city is not a major factor addressed in the strategic plan, but proactive attempts to avoid potential conflict are worth noting. Monrovia hosts an annual CEO reception to maintain healthy relationships with local business leaders and to explore new economic development opportunities for the city. Networking events like this target specific local and regional business organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Foothill Workforce Investment Board, Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, and the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership. The strategic plan identifies these external stakeholders as mutual partners in the city’s effort to generate tax revenue and deliver efficient public goods and services. It is clear that the city’s effort to maintain positive and healthy relationships with these stakeholders is an attempt to avoid conflict and accomplish mutually beneficial goals. Stakeholder groups do not have direct influence on the content of the strategic plan; however, the plan acknowledges that stakeholder groups are partners that will help Monrovia address its intermediate and long-term goal of fiscal sustainability.

Goals and Outcome Variables

All of Monrovia's city goals are Short-Term and Mid-Range in nature. The City Council explicitly states that the intent of *Plan Monrovia* is to prioritize five-year goals into three tiers. However, the document does not clearly assign concrete timelines to specific goals, so one can only assume that all goals must be met within five years. The city organized its strategic plan into three parts: Top priority "Major City Goals," "Other Important Objectives" that rank secondary in priority, and "Ideas to Address as Funds Become Available" that rank lowest in priority. This three-tiered distinction signals that the city recognizes its problem areas and resource limitations and is transparent about the fact that certain ideas and projects may fall outside the scope of this strategic plan. However, neither the "Work Plans" nor "Cheat Sheet" documents clarify which goals are first-, second-, and third-level priorities. Both supplemental documents describe how Monrovia addresses nearly two-thirds of its 49 citywide goals in fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15. This majority is comprised of ongoing, multi-year goals as opposed to one-time projects. Goals in the other third appear in only one of these fiscal years and are research- and information-gathering activities. For example, Environmental Stewardship Task 1 (ES1) is a yearlong research project that explores the funding and staffing requirements for the creation of an Energy Action Plan.

Metrics and Performance Indicators

The strategic plan does not identify Metrics for Outcome Assessment, but all goals, tasks, and actions have associated metrics in the "Work Plans" document. Most

metrics are vague and ambiguous. For example, Historic Preservation Goal 1 (HP1) is the continued administration of the existing Historic Preservation program, which is the City Planning Division's primary function. Under HP1, the Community Development Department and Planning Divisions will demolish 12-15 pre-1940s housing units per year. Monrovia expects this work to enhance the city's character and identity and contribute to increased downtown property values, leading to an increase in local property taxes. The "Work Plans" does not explain how the Planning Division concluded that maintaining current operation levels is the city's best option. However, this information may be available elsewhere in the Planning Division's internal documents.

Another vague goal is Economic Development Goal 4 (ED4). Under ED4, the city will highlight local businesses at major citywide events. The intended outcome of this activity is to encourage and enhance networking within the business community. The associated ED4 metric is "Increase business participation at existing City events," but there is no baseline measurement to gauge a desired level of increased participation. Furthermore, there is no metric to gauge whether city-sponsored networking events produce measureable benefits. ED4 states that the city will focus its resources on three networking events per year, but why only three events? How will Monrovia measure its return on investment? There are missing pieces of information that generate several questions about "Work Plans" metrics and performance indicators.

Plan Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monrovia's City Council acknowledges that two fiscal years is not an adequate amount of time to accomplish all *Plan Monrovia* projects. For this reason Periodic Check-In and Reporting Requirements are built into the strategic plan each year for the next five years. No specific reporting schedules exist for individual goals, tasks, and actions; however, the "Work Plans" suggests that the city's bi-annum budget process drives reporting requirements.

Plan Monrovia relies exclusively on quantitative metrics for goal measurement purposes, but no other Feedback Loop mechanisms exist in this strategic plan. However, Monrovia's Community Engagement campaign produced feedback from thousands of internal and external stakeholders (City of Monrovia, 2013a). The public responded to an open-ended survey question that asked, "What are the most important things the City should focus on over the next five years?" Online forums and chat tools, in-person verbal responses, written letters, and traditional postal survey formats captured response data that the City Council used to inform the content of Plan Monrovia. The initial outreach campaign is certainly comprehensive, but there is no evidence of continued public outreach efforts for future iterations of the strategic plan. In an effort to keep the public informed, the City Council states it will make "Work Plans" and "Cheat Sheet" documents publically available. This attempt to keep the public informed is a valuable first step, but unfortunately it appears that the "Cheat Sheet" was never updated. It is unclear when the city last updated the "Cheat Sheet," but there is only one version of it

available online and all Top Priority Goals are listed as “0% Complete.” The City Council’s budget study sessions occur during regular City Council meetings and are likely the preferred venue for public updates about the strategic plan. However, it is not clear per the strategic plan that a budget study session is a deliberate attempt to create a strategic plan feedback loop mechanism. Nevertheless, the City Council could leverage regular budget study sessions as a venue to discuss strategic plan evaluation and modification.

Strategic Plan Integration

Plan Monrovia is the city’s first attempt at creating a comprehensive city-wide strategic plan, and there is no evidence to suggest that the plan is integrated into other key municipal documents. I searched for evidence of integration by conducting a “*Plan Monrovia*” keyword search on the city’s website, reviewing the city’s FY 13-15 and FY 15-17 budget documents, reading the General Plan, and searching the city’s “City Goals” and “Government Transparency” websites to no avail. This lack of integration suggests that the city may be experiencing difficulty implementing and integrating its five-year strategic plan.

The city’s budget website indicates the City Council schedules multiple budget study sessions in May and June of each fiscal year to evaluate and prioritize activities for the upcoming year. A June 2013 budget study session document explains that funds available at that time would support two-thirds of the *Plan Monrovia* projects. The remaining third was to remain unfunded, but considered for implementation in future

fiscal years. However, Monrovia's FY 2015-17 Adopted Budget is a 45-slide PowerPoint presentation that makes no mention of the strategic plan (City of Monrovia, 2015). Outside of the budget PowerPoint slides, the city's revenue and expenditure projection and fund allocation reports are available but difficult to read. The 2015-2017 budget website contains 10 separate reports that paint the city's fiscal picture using abbreviations and internal coding. There is no apparent continuity among these reports other than the fact that they appear on the same webpage. Also, there is no report key or reference resource available to decode these documents and understand how they relate to one another or the strategic plan.

Richmond

Richmond

Population: 103,701

Median Income: \$54,589

Land Area: 30.07 sq. mi.

Contra Costa County

(U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)

Mission: The City of Richmond shall provide services that enhance economic vitality, the environment and the quality of life of our community.

Vision: Richmond will develop a clean and well-maintained environment for individuals who live, work and play within its boundaries by maintaining a safe and secure community, continuing the development of a diverse economic base, maintaining a sustainable and environmentally friendly quality of life while promoting an effective government to efficiently serve the needs of the community that are fundamental to the health, quality of life and economic vitality of Richmond.

Values: Honesty; Excellent Customer Service; Teamwork; Commitment; Innovation, Creativity, and Risk-Taking; Effective Results; Community Involvement

The City Council, Commissions and staff embrace the following five distinct Strategic Goals:

- I. Maintain and Enhance the Physical Environment*
 - II. Promote a Safe and Secure Community*
 - III. Promote Economic Vitality*
 - IV. Promote Sustainable Communities*
 - V. Promote Effective Government*
- (City of Richmond, n.d., p. 5)*

The City of Richmond is located in the northern California county of Contra Costa in what is commonly referred to as the East Bay. In October 2009, the city developed its own strategic business plan as a key tool for implementing the general plan. The 71-page document titled *Five-Year Strategic Business Plan 2009-2014* is the most current version of Richmond's strategic plan, and can be found online on the city's official strategic plan website (<http://www.ci.richmond.ca.us/1785/Five-Year-Strategic-Business-Plan>).

Internal Environmental Variables

Richmond does not include an organization chart in its strategic plan, but the city accounts for its Structural Size and Complexity in other ways. The plan identifies the roles and responsibilities of specific internal stakeholder groups who play an active role in operationalizing specific objectives and tasks. For example, the city assigns “Goal Two: Promote a Safe and Secure Community” to the Office of Neighborhood Safety, Library and Cultural Services, and Recreation Departments in addition to the Police and Fire Departments. Richmond’s community-based, proactive strategy attempts to prevent crime, reduce blight, and engage youth and adults in public education programs. This multi-pronged approach engages multiple internal stakeholders and addresses Richmond’s immediate and future public safety needs beyond traditional Police and Fire Departments.

Staff Skills, in terms of professional capacity, knowledge base, and ability to forecast future challenges, are present throughout this document. The Executive Summary section contains simple but informative five-year projections about population, housing units, commercial development, and land use. Additionally, there are two instances when Richmond exceeds minimum expectations. The Green Team is a group of internal staff charged with ensuring that all city departments engage in environmentally sustainable energy reduction practices. The scope of the Green Team’s work includes development of a Climate Action Plan, policies to achieve zero waste landfills, citywide programs to reduce the use of non-renewable products, and the

elimination of products that contain harmful chemical compounds from municipal use. This team's work requires a staff that possess specialized skillsets and who are capable of formulating reasonable and sustainable alternatives to current practices. This team's policy recommendations and program proposals will undoubtedly affect the behaviors and professional practices of internal and external organizational stakeholders alike. Addressing the city's context-specific needs as well as those of Richmond residents and business owners requires highly developed analytical and planning skillsets.

Beyond the Green Team, Key Objective 5.3: "Create Comprehensive Training Programs to Improve Customer Service" focuses the Human Resources Department's resources on professional development and staff satisfaction. The city commits to developing department-specific training and certification programs for line staff as well as a management academy for new and current supervisors. Furthermore, Supporting Action 5.3.a sets a staff satisfaction target level of 90% or higher, which indicates that Richmond is making a concerted effort to develop a highly skilled and content workforce. It is not clear if the intent of these staff and management training initiatives is to provide strategic planning training, and all supporting actions map poorly to General Plan Goal HR3: "Increase Public Awareness of Richmond's Historic Resources." Nevertheless, the city demonstrates that it values its employees by dedicating time, energy, and resources to their professional development.

All evidence suggests that Richmond developed an internal Culture of support for its strategic planning activities. There is limited qualitative feedback to support this

claim outside of a broad statement that the City Council, Committees, and staff all support the strategic plan. The city makes a deliberate effort to outline a clear logic chain that connects its Key Objectives, Supporting Actions, and General Plan Goals. By building out a high-level view of five-year citywide priorities, Richmond's City Council identifies the tangible connections between daily work and its broader, long-term vision. Normative theory suggests that successful attempts to create clarity from the organization's highly complex work builds broad-based organizational support for the strategic plan. There is limited evidence to support this claim here, but again, there is no obvious indication to suggest that there is internal opposition to this strategic plan.

Strategic planning decision-making authority is Centralized and clearly delegated to the City Council. The opening line of Executive Summary states it was developed to, "help the Richmond City Council assess the effects of today's policy decisions on the City's future and quality of life of its residents" (City of Richmond, 2009a, para. 1). Each City Department may have the authority to propose a preferred set of objectives and activities, but ultimately the final decision about which initiatives the city will pursue rests with the City Council.

Richmond's advanced level of Technological Complexity is evident in Strategic Goals 1, 2, and 3. In addition to its basic services and municipal programs, Richmond engages in the San Pablo Avenue joint streetscape-visioning project with neighboring El Cerrito. The city also has service level agreements with West Contra Costa County to deliver fire and emergency medical services and works with the National Parks Service to

attract tourists to the Rosie the Riveter National Historic Park. Finally, the city's executive team proactively collaborates with the League of California Cities to advance legislation that advocates for a change in the fiscal relationship between the State of California and local municipal governments like Richmond. All of these examples are evidence to support the notion that Richmond relies on a vast network of partners to deliver a wide breadth of public services in ways that support a larger strategic vision.

Several pieces of Core Technology explicitly reference and enhance the Strategic Business Plan including three separate financial reports: the five-year Financial Plan, annual Capital Improvement Plan, and Operating Budget. Each supporting document is more than 100 pages in length, or in the case of the Adopted FY 2013-2015 Biennial budget, nearly 450 pages. Despite their physical characteristics, Richmond's Five-Year Financial Plan contains a detailed flow chart that maps the relationship between it, the other two documents, and how all three are referenced in relation to one another in practice. Each of the documents also contains a series of physical maps and spreadsheets, pie charts, and bar graphs that contain actual and future revenue and expenditure projection. All of this data inform the City Council's prioritization and strategic plan decision-making process. As a stand-alone document, the Strategic Business Plan is the qualitative high-level overview of the city's strategic goals and objectives. On the other hand, the Five-Year Financial Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, and Operating Budget contain quantitative fiscal data.

External Environmental Variables

The economic downturns of 2001 and 2008 are the primary Hostility and Benevolence factors that threaten Richmond's ability to deliver municipal services. Both the sales and property tax revenues sustained losses following a decline in retail sales and as a result of property being reassessed at lower values. The drop in property tax revenues is further exacerbated by the housing slump, but the overall tone of this document is positive and entrepreneurial. The strategic plan discusses how Richmond's diverse economic base allowed the city to remain relatively stable despite both economic recession periods. Goal 3.5: "Grow the City's Tax Base" and 3.6: "Increase Grant Revenues" are two strategic tools the city uses to mitigate the effects of a poor economic climate. To grow the sales tax base, Richmond plans to complete construction on a retail shopping center and explore opportunities for high-density retail and housing space around a Marina Bay ferry terminal location. Richmond also strategically pursues grant funding opportunities that are consistent with its general plan priorities. The City Council collaborates with a private consultant group to ensure that Richmond manages its grants, rather than allowing grant funds to drive Richmond's strategic activities. With this foresight, the city positions itself and the strategic plan to successfully manage if and when it will take on a new initiative or strategic objective.

City efforts to collaborate with faith-based organizations, NGOs, and business partners mitigate Conflict that could arise between Richmond and its external stakeholders. In fact, a handful of programs address the needs of the city's most

immediate stakeholder group: citizens. Community participation is encouraged and supported by the Graffiti Abatement Program, youth activities, and afterschool programs offered by the Richmond Police Activities League, Public Library, and the Office of Neighborhood Safety. Also, Richmond's Hand in Hand initiative is the city's attempt to provide leadership, collaboration, and evaluation trainings for underfunded local non-profit organizations. This initiative is outside the scope of the General Plan, but Richmond believes that capacity building with local non-profits will enhance the services and service delivery efforts of those organizations. Furthermore, as part of Goal 3: "Promote Economic Vitality," the city provides the YouthWORKS and RichmondWORKS workforce training and skill development programs for local residents. It also works with multi-national corporations like Honda and Chevron to offer local jobs at the deep water port and crude oil refinery. Overall, the strategic plan supports the notion that Richmond successfully leverages its relationships with external stakeholder groups to avoid conflict where possible.

There is minimal External Influence in terms of the city's ability to articulate its overall mission, choose goals, and decide which programs to offer. In fact, there is very little evidence in this strategic plan to suggest any external influence at all. The *2012/13-2016/17 Five-Year Financial Plan* supports this observation but also explains that the City Council receives community feedback and priorities via a community-involved budgeting process. A city-managed standing committee hosts community workshops and neighborhood council meetings in May and June of each fiscal year. Feedback obtained

at these workshops is delivered to Richmond's key decision makers, including the Mayor, City Council members, City Manager, and Director of Finance. These individuals then engage in a structured process that ultimately concludes with a plan implementation decision. In other words, the city's problem identification, analysis, and deliberation processes manage external stakeholder expectations.

Goals and Outcome Variables

All of Richmond's goals are Short-Term and Mid-Range in nature. By definition, the Strategic Business Plan covers a five-year time span with some exceptions. The success indicators for replacement of all city-owned deteriorating light poles (Supporting Action 1.2.f) and completion of the Transit Village residential project (Supporting Action 3.2.j) will be measured in FY 2014-15. The other exception to the five-year strategic plan window is goal 4.8.b to establish a policy allowing the city to achieve zero waste to landfills by 2040. Outside these three supporting actions, many of Richmond's goals were scheduled for completion prior to or by the end of FY 2013-14.

However, a majority of the strategic plan's strategic objectives are ongoing projects that have no Identifiable Beginning and End Points. Goal One: "Maintain and Enhance the Physical Environment" has 56 Supporting Actions, but 29 of those actions have no specified completion date. For example, "number of projects completed" is the success indicator for Supporting Action 1.5.d: Design and construct improvements listed in the current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The CIP is a document the city revises annually, so it is reasonable to assume that Supporting Action 1.5.d is an ongoing project

with no end date. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that not all proposed CIP projects would be funded or pursued on an annual basis. Nevertheless, because the strategic plan is a qualitative document, it does not provide adequate detail about how many CIP projects are necessary or appropriate. I assume the Public Works Department considers completed CIP projects a success, but there is no evidence to suggest a reasonable or appropriate number of completed projects on an annual basis.

How Richmond will accomplish its vision is clearly delineated in each of the strategic plan's five main goals. For example, Richmond highlights the fact that it was one of the first California cities to incorporate a community health and wellness component into its strategic business plan and general plan documents. Goal 4.9: "Promote Community Health and Wellness" outlines exactly how the city will accomplish this unique goal. This grant-funded initiative focuses on developing municipal policies and taking action to provide residents with healthy food, exercise, and recreation options and to address water and air quality issues. The city will collaborate with county-level organizations to identify and align common public health initiatives, promote urban agriculture programs to address childhood obesity, expand community nutrition education, and establish designated "Quiet Zones" throughout the city.

Metrics and Performance Indicators

Each Supporting Goal of the strategic plan has an associated Success Indicator. As a stand-alone reference point, this document is transparent and clearly outlines all actions the city will take to realize its larger vision. It is apparent that Richmond's

leadership took ample time to develop this strategic plan because all Supporting Goals and associated Success Indicators map directly to specific goals in the General Plan. This qualitative document is bolstered by the city's *2012/13-2016/17 Five-Year Financial Plan*, which is a highly detailed quantitative assessment of Richmond's revenues, expenditures, and CIP priorities. Despite its transparency, this document is truly not intended to serve as a stand-alone document, but it adequately identifies the specific Metrics and Performance Indicators the city will use to gauge its progress.

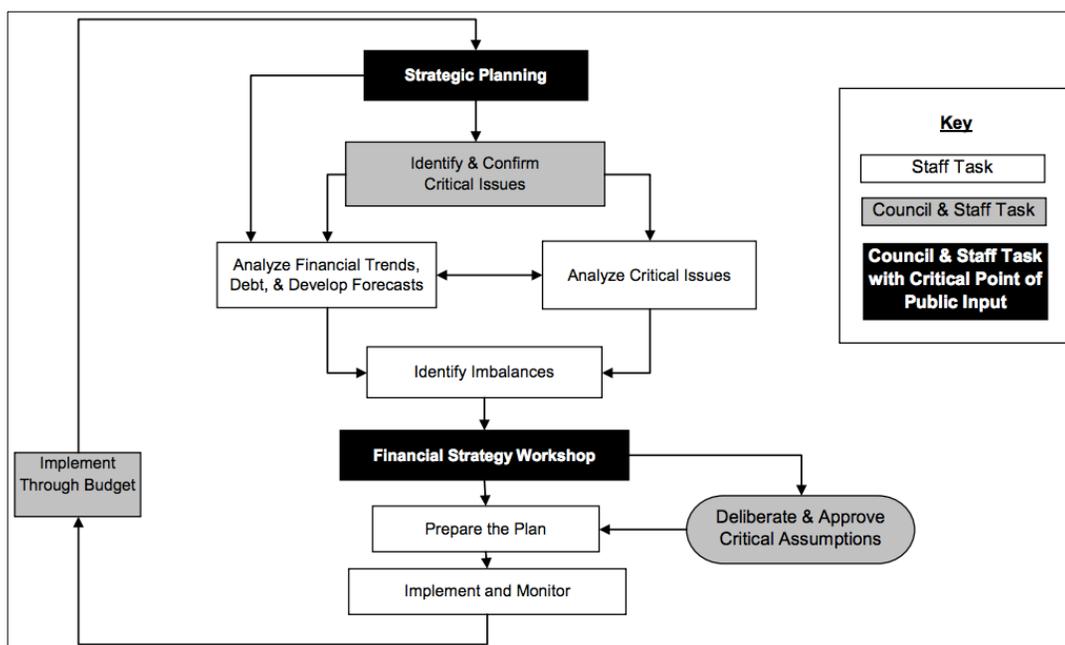
Plan Modification and Evaluation Mechanisms

The primary feedback loop mechanisms Richmond uses to manage Periodic Check-ins and Reporting Requirements and capture Qualitative and Quantitative Feedback data are only briefly mentioned in the Executive Summary. As a five-year document, the Strategic Business Plan is informed by annual intermediate feedback loops that occur at the Operating Budget and CIP levels. The strategic plan does not mention if Community Engagement Activities informed its development or how community feedback will be incorporated into future iterations of it. To this end, the timeframe for this *Five-Year Strategic Business Plan 2009-2014* ended in 2014, and there is no evidence to suggest that Richmond developed or is developing an updated version.

Basic feedback loop diagrams exist on pages 6 and 17 of the FY 2012-13 to 2016-17 version of the five-year Financial Plan. The flow of these feedback loops is mapped as follows. The General Plan is the long-range, overarching central reference point document that guides all municipal activities, projects, and initiatives. The strategic

business and five-year financial plans inform and complement one another. The Strategic Plan qualitatively outlines the city's broad goals while the Financial Plan charts a quantitative path to ensure consistent levels of public services. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), Business Plan, and Financial Plan all influence and inform one another as well. The business and financial plans inform the Operating Budget, but not vice versa. Instead, the annual CIP and Operating Budget inform and complement one another.

Figure 2 is taken directly from *2012/13-2016/17 Five-Year Financial Plan* and provides additional detail about the strategic planning feedback loops used to inform the city's decision-making process.



Source: City of Richmond (n.d., p. 17)

Figure 2. Five-year financial plan process.

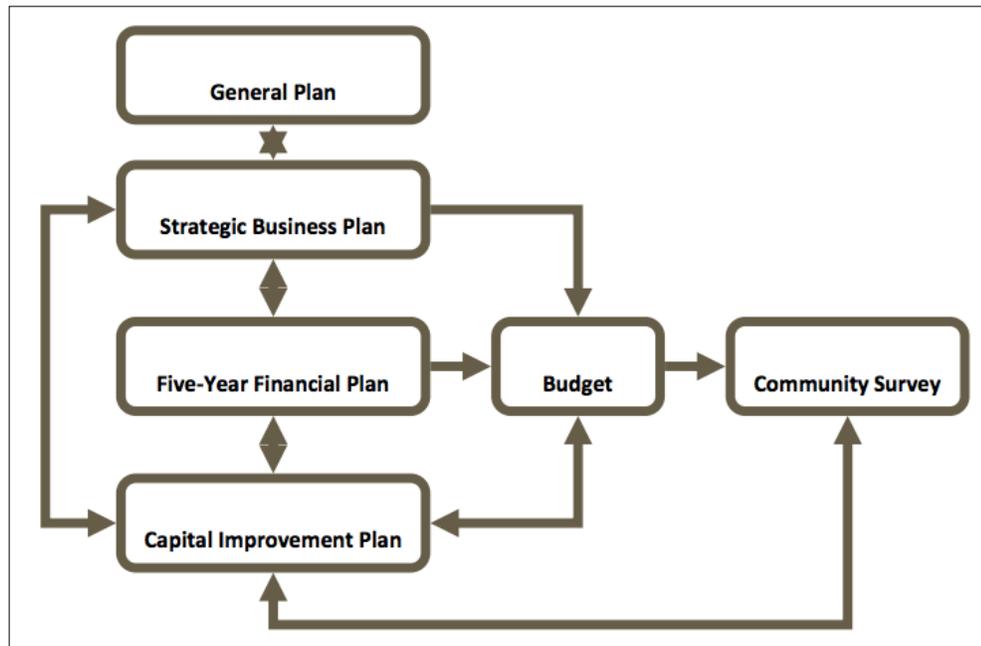
The budget's indirect relationship to the business and financial plans is moderated by the CIP, and the CIP has two primary functions. The first is to address the city's

ongoing infrastructure maintenance, rehabilitation, and replacement needs. Secondly, the CIP identifies other capital improvement grant-funded programs that may support the city's economic development efforts. Finally, the Operating Budget and CIP inform and are informed by two types of community surveys. In 2007, 2009, and 2011, Richmond participated in the National Citizen Survey, a random sampling of 3,000 residents that gauges their perceptions about the city's performance. Survey results from each year were then compared to determine if and how the city's work changed public perception. Additionally, Richmond builds trust between the city and its residents by hosting community budgeting sessions. The city has a standing committee that conducts annual neighborhood workshops with the express intent of helping citizens gain a better understanding of the budget and budgeting process.

Strategic Plan Integration

Much of the discussion surrounding Richmond's Strategic Business Plan is provided above because the city made deliberate efforts to link its strategic plan to each of its other key municipal documents. Richmond's *Five-Year Strategic Business Plan 2009-2014* is fully integrated into the city's long-range *General Plan 2030 City of Richmond, 2012b*), the *2012/13-2016/17 Five-Year Financial Plan* (City of Richmond, 2009b), and short-term Capital Improvement Plan (City of Richmond, 2012a) and Operating Budget (City of Richmond, 2013). The Business Plan and General Plan were developed simultaneously and each one contains an explicit reference to the other. Several years later, Richmond developed its Financial Plan, Capital Improvement Plan,

and Operating Budget, but again all documents explicitly reference one another and describe their connections in detail. Figure 3 is taken directly from the *2012/13-2016/17 Five-Year Financial Plan* and documents interactions and the relationships between each of these key municipal documents. Together, these city documents provide outsiders with an in-depth view of what the city is, what it does, and why it does it.



Source: City of Richmond (n.d., p. 6)

Figure 3. Richmond's planning framework.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The goal of my analysis was twofold: 1. Search for evidence of the four thematic content items in each city's strategic plan and 2. Determine whether or not each public organization uses its strategic plan to guide decision making. Additionally, I evaluated key municipal documents to determine if the strategic plans are fully, partially, or not integrated into each public organization. I reviewed the normative literature on strategic planning that outlines recommended best practices for public organizations. Based on this review and the results of an empirical study from Milwaukee, I identified four broad categories and 12 specific subcategories of content that should be readily identifiable in a strategic plan. More specifically, I wanted to know if each of the case study organizations did four things: Articulate and identify process and environmental variables, establish organizational goals and outcomes that link to these variables, develop qualitative and quantitative performance metrics, and, finally, create feedback loops that inform iterative evaluation and strategic plan retooling. I analyzed the strategic plans of El Cerrito, Monrovia, and Richmond using a qualitative assessment approach. My conclusions from each case study and the broader context for public sector strategic planning follow.

Conclusions

El Cerrito

As a stand-alone document, El Cerrito's strategic plan does not include many subcategory criteria. It is intended to be a high-level vision-orienting document, but overall, it is a "bare bones" attempt at strategic planning. The foundation for a meaningful strategic plan is present, but there are too many gaps and missing elements for this to be a document of any practical use. My initial impression of El Cerrito's plan was that it did an adequate job of identifying and outlining organizational vision and mission. The city's leadership spent over two years gathering and analyzing community feedback, which was then used to inform the development of its comprehensive strategic plan. In this regard, it seems that El Cerrito invested time and resources to consider how each municipal department or program delivers services that support the strategic plan. However, once I dug deeper, I realized it was a Goals and Outcomes wish list filled with well-intentioned content that lacks substantive value. I was surprised to find that the document is full of what Rumelt (2011) terms "buzzwords." Furthermore, there is no evidence that an environmental scan was conducted to identify pressing internal issues within the organization. The plan lists and categorizes several activities, but short-term and mid-range goals are not tied to any tangible action. Also, there is no mention whatsoever of how El Cerrito will conduct its work, measure performance or progress, or evaluate and retool the strategic plan.

El Cerrito's strategic plan is more valuable if reviewed in conjunction with the biennial budget (City of El Cerrito, 2014). For the past nine and four years respectively, El Cerrito received the California Society of Municipal Finance Officers award for "Operating Budget Excellence" and the Government Finance Officers Association award for "Distinguished Budget Presentation." Given that the city received these prestigious awards by state and federal level professional organizations, it is not surprising to find that the biennial budget is truly the city's "showcase" document. The budget links short-term activities to mid-range goals and objectives and incorporates detailed performance metrics. In addition, the budget contains qualitative reflections about how El Cerrito will modify and adapt its strategic initiatives in the future. Given the depth, breadth, content, and high degree of professionalism present in the biennial budget, I question why El Cerrito's leadership felt the need to create a strategic plan. The city could have conducted public engagement activities and documented the results without creating a strategic plan. Furthermore, El Cerrito's staff members possess the skillset to develop a comprehensive and detail-oriented biennial that fulfills the same purpose as a strategic plan as described in the literature. Taking all of these factors into consideration, it is unclear why El Cerrito has such an ineffective strategic plan.

I can only assume that this strategic plan is El Cerrito's first attempt to reframe the city's current context. The *1999 General Plan* is outdated (City of El Cerrito, 1999) possibly because the economic recessions of 2001 and 2008 changed the contextual realities of many California cities, including El Cerrito. However, if El Cerrito wanted

seven examples of context-specific strategic plan blueprints and a list of supporting actions, it need not look any further than the SAPs embedded in its own general plan. SAPs are small-scale examples of a strategic plan that could be built out and expanded for city-wide use. The strategic plan makes mention of the “Implementation Action Plans,” which may satisfy the same purpose as the SAPs, but I was unsuccessful at locating these documents. The strategic plan and biennial budget documents are closely linked to one another, but El Cerrito’s budget is the document that defines what this city is, what it does, and why it does it.

Monrovia

Monrovia’s strategic plan is a very high-level document and captures most of my subcategory criteria. However, Monrovia’s strategic plan would be better served if it clearly stated the city’s vision for the future. There is no mention of the city’s vision or mission throughout the entire strategic plan. A guiding vision sends the message to internal and external stakeholders alike that the city has a purpose. Therefore, all municipal activities chart a path and direct the city toward that vision. By not clearly incorporating the vision into its strategic plan, Monrovia opens its organization up to a host of stakeholder demands that may not be remotely appropriate or applicable. For example, results from Monrovia’s community engagement initiative indicate that the city reached over 10,000 residents using a multi-modal approach. This outreach campaign yielded hundreds of comments, suggestions, critiques, and compliments, but there is no way the city can satisfy the individual needs of each citizen.

Likewise, I could only find hints that allude to the city's looming challenges. The City Manager's opening statement on the first page of the strategic plan notes that Monrovia is struggling with public employee pension issues. However, it is not clear that this challenge truly causes a strain on Monrovia's ability to deliver programs and services. Vallejo and Stockton are two well-documented instances of municipal bankruptcy exacerbated by unfunded pension obligations. If Monrovia has similar concerns about program and service delivery obligations, it would be better served by making clear connections between the strategic plan and city budget.

Given the lack of transparency of Monrovia's budget documents, it is not surprising to understand why the strategic plan makes only brief mention of the budget and vice versa. This missing link suggests that Monrovia is having difficulty allocating funding for, or has not yet addressed, the strategic plan's implementation. For the time being, the strategic plan is a wish list. As a stand-alone document the strategic plan's two redeeming qualities are its supplemental documents: "Work Plans" and "Cheat Sheet." The latter is a summary version of the detailed "Work Plans" document. It is a report card style document that stakeholders can use to monitor strategic plan implementation at a high level. On the other hand, "Work Plans" provides additional clarity about how Monrovia approaches the content and scope of its strategic plan. "Work Plans" assigns one-time and ongoing cost projections to specific projects, but, like the strategic plan, it is disconnected from Monrovia's budget. Finally, there are no clear linkages between the seven elements of the General Plan and the Strategic Plan despite the fact that the

General Plan elements are relatively current (developed between 2002 and 2008). All of this evidence suggests that although the strategic plan content satisfies many of the major criteria, there is no evidence of plan implementation. I doubt that Monrovia is using its strategic plan to guide decision-making because it is not integrated into other key municipal documents.

Richmond

As a stand-alone document, Richmond's *Five-Year Strategic Business Plan 2009-2014* is a content driven, comprehensive, and detail-oriented strategic plan. The Business Plan is a key reference point to inform and remind decision makers why the city engages in specific activities. Each chapter of the plan is dedicated to a specific key objective that details supporting actions, identifies success indicators, and maps almost seamlessly to the long-range General Plan. The plan's three major shortcomings are: (a) It is predominantly qualitative; (b) There is no mention of how the city engages residents; the city's primary external stakeholder group; and, finally, (c) The City's mission, vision, and values are not readily identifiable.

However, none of these concerns are major issues. The five-year financial plan, Operating Budget, and Capital Improvement Plans are quantitative in nature. The General Plan describes how Richmond completed more than 100 community engagement activities during the six-year period preceding its adoption. Also, the city's community budgeting process solicits input from residents multiple times annually to inform future iterations of the Financial Plan. Overall, the city produced the Business Plan and its other

key municipal documents with a high degree of detail and professionalism. Evidence suggests that Richmond's strategic plan defines what the organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

At this point, two main questions stand out in my mind: Will Richmond produce an updated 2015-2020 version of the Business Plan and did the city take on more than it could reasonably accomplish in a five-year time span? If Richmond decides to develop an updated Business Plan, it will certainly have a solid foundation to start. However, I am not convinced that an updated Business Plan would be in Richmond's best interest at this point. The Business Plan is an ambitious undertaking, and I would be surprised if any city could feasibly accomplish all 44 Key Objectives and 262 Supporting Actions within five years. Many objectives outlined in the plan are the initial phases of much larger, multi-decade municipal projects while others pertain to ongoing maintenance that could feasibly have no future end point. Still, there are other objectives and supporting actions that would be better placed in an immediate or short-term plan that spans several weeks or months.

I suspect that at some point during the run-cycle of the Business Plan, the city's decision makers realized it needed a comparable financial plan that identifies concurrent funding streams to operationalize all objectives and supporting actions. For this reason, I am not surprised the city has a separate five-year financial plan overlapping the second half of the Business Plan. I suspect that Richmond could create a new five-year Business Plan by identifying objectives and supporting actions it failed to accomplish in

the 2009-2014 five-year plan. Decision makers would then evaluate whether incomplete goals are still feasible or relevant given the city's current environmental context and fiscal projections.

Limitations

There are limitations to this approach, namely that it is a big-picture, qualitative assessment of three case studies. Because I limited the scope of this thesis to looking at online documents and city websites only, there may be additional hard copy documents that did not make it into my analysis. Additionally, this approach may exclude important documents or other nuances not reflected in formal written documents, such as non-published environmental scan documents (i.e., SWOT analyses, internal memoranda), informal email correspondences, and verbal discussions between stakeholders behind closed doors.

To expand the scope of this thesis in the future, I would consider looking at additional case studies, conducting key stakeholder interviews, and distributing surveys within each organization. Because I chose to evaluate official online documents only, I may have over- or under-interpreted the extent to which each organization uses its strategic plan. Given additional time and resources, I believe stakeholder interviews would be the most valuable addition to this study. I am particularly interested in learning more about the effects of organizational culture on the creation, implementation, and modification of a strategic plan. For example, it is possible that decision makers in El Cerrito discuss the strategic plan frequently despite its bare bones approach. Interviews

with key decision makers in Monrovia may help answer empirical questions about the city's strategic plan implementation challenges. Also, I would like to know why these case study cities chose to engage in strategic planning. I suppose legislative mandate may be a factor, but there may be certain context-specific variables that prompted each of these public organizations to engage in strategic planning for the first time. I was unable to determine why El Cerrito created a strategic plan given its superb budget document. My interpretations of all three case studies might be altered provided additional or different qualitative and quantitative data.

Suggestions for Practitioners

Link to Supplementary Documents

Each of these three case studies contained valuable examples of what to do and what to avoid in terms of creating critical linkages to other key documents. El Cerrito's strategic plan is simply too sparse, but it is backed by a superb budget document. Monrovia is an example of "strategic planning light" (Hendrick, 2010). It satisfactorily conveys key objectives and with its "Work Plans," demonstrates a concerted municipal effort to organize actions and tasks in cohesive and meaningful ways. However, Monrovia's report card style "Cheat Sheet" is the most valuable piece of the entire strategic plan. That supporting document is an informative and succinct quick reference tool for any stakeholder, including leaders and decision makers. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to suggest Monrovia uses the "Cheat Sheet" in practice. Richmond's plan is thorough, comprehensive, methodically integrated and, by all accounts, implemented.

That city prepared an exhaustive strategic plan and linked it to every other key municipal document it produced. However, I doubt that Richmond will accomplish all of its five-year goals. Finally, I suggest that these three cities move their strategic plan document to the front of their webpage. Ease of locating strategic plan documents online was not part of my analysis criteria. However, for a document intended to define what a public organization is, what it does, and why it does it, I was surprised that all three strategic plans were relatively difficult to locate. In sum, an “ideal” strategic plan is one that draws upon the best elements of each case study. If I were a public decision maker interested in strategic planning, I would use the following as my reference guides: El Cerrito’s Biennial Budget, Monrovia’s “Cheat Sheet,” and, finally, Richmond’s Strategic Five-Year Financial Plan Feedback Loop model and comprehensive integration strategy.

Table 8

Key Strengths and Weaknesses

Case Study	Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>El Cerrito</i>	<p>Internal Environment: Culture committed to planning Centralized decision making</p> <p>External Environment: Manages potential conflict</p> <p>Integration/Implementation: Linked closely to a budget</p> <p>Why it does it: Clear vision and mission</p>	<p>Internal Environment: Lacks comprehensive scan</p> <p>Goals and Outcomes: No start/end points No short-term/mid-range distinctions No measure of tangible tasks/actions</p> <p>Integration/Implementation: Not linked to General Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, or other supporting documents</p> <p>Performance Metrics: Unavailable in plan</p> <p>Modification and Evaluation: No tools available</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Case Study	Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>Monrovia</i>	<p>Internal Environment: Thorough scan – accounts for all departments and divisions Culture committed to planning Supplemental docs – “Work Plans” and “Cheat Sheet”</p> <p>External Environment: Plans for hostility Manages conflict and stakeholder expectations</p> <p>Goals and Outcomes: Short-term and mid-range are clearly identifiable</p> <p>Performance Metrics: Clear and measurable Qualitative and Quantitative</p> <p>Modification and Evaluation: Check-in/reporting requirements Public engagement strategy</p>	<p>Goals and Outcomes: No Beginning/End Points</p> <p>Performance Metrics: Lacks Qualitative and Quantitative Feedback Loops</p> <p>Integration/Implementation: Not linked to any other key documents</p>

Table 8 (continued)

<i>Richmond</i>	<p>Internal Environment: Thorough scan – accounts for all departments and divisions Culture committed to planning Centralized decision making Acknowledges organizational structure and complexity</p> <p>External Environment: Manages potential hostility, conflict, external influence,</p> <p>Goals and Outcomes: Short-term and mid-range are clearly identifiable Clear Beginning/End points Clear how work is conducted</p> <p>Performance Metrics: Comprehensive metrics</p> <p>Modification and Evaluation: Regular Check-ins/Reporting Requirements</p> <p>Integration/Implementation: Fully integrated into all key documents including budget, General Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, Financial Plan</p>	<p>Modification and Evaluation: No clear mechanism to engage stakeholders</p>
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Integration and Implementation

Within the context of this thesis, I did not find an example of an “ideal” strategic plan, but Richmond’s *Five-Year Strategic Business Plan 2009-2014* comes close.

Richmond is a perfect example of a city that invests significant time, fiscal, and human

resources into the development of its strategic plan and guiding documents. The city's approach is clear and comprehensive. Key objectives and supporting actions are multi-pronged and integrate back to a long-term visionary document. Richmond's plan does have shortcomings, namely that it is highly qualitative and there is no mention of feedback loops. However, after analyzing all key municipal documents, I came away with very few questions about what the city is, what it does, and why it does it. From an outsider's perspective, the document gives the impression that city leaders use the strategic plan to develop a clear sense of internal and external organizational cognizance. Finally, there is evidence to support the claim that city leaders integrate and use the plan to inform decision-making and practical implementation of strategic initiatives.

Plan Tangibly: Be Practical, Be Intentional

All three case studies suggest that a comprehensive strategic plan can help define the organization's vision and purpose, but without an integration and implementation mechanism (i.e., a budget) the strategic plan is an organizational wish list. In El Cerrito and Richmond, I found that the strategic plans are enhanced and supported by a financial plan, a budget, or both. In terms of content, Monrovia's strategic plan was a far better example of what to do, especially when compared side-by-side with El Cerrito's. However, the major difference between these two cities is that El Cerrito's budget maps resources to tangible actions the city can use to measure progress toward the larger vision and Monrovia's does not. This leads me to believe a stand-alone strategic plan is not necessarily the document that adds public value. Instead, the strategic plan's connection

to a comprehensive, realistic, and well-organized budget is what makes the plan implementable to add public value. Alternatively, the El Cerrito case study suggests that a public organization can use a budget in place of a strategic plan to define what it is, what it does, and why it does it.

A strategic plan is one of many tools that public organizations can use to articulate its vision, guide decision-making, and manage its work. However, I suspect that a strategic plan may only be as valuable as the resources and energy available to make it actionable; and to make the plan actionable, it must be developed with intentionality and practicality. Why invest valuable time, energy, and resources into a document that will collect cyber dust buried within a website? If you create a strategic plan, then do so with intention and plan to use it.

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