

Riverbend Water
Resources
District
Visioning
Retreat Final
Report

October 2013



Riverbend Water Resources District

Visioning Retreat

Introduction

The Board of Riverbend Water Resources District held a retreat on October 25, 29, and 31, 2013 that focused on clarifying the Board's purpose, developing a strategic vision, and establishing strategic goals and priorities. This retreat was facilitated by Dr. Mike Mowery, Director of Leadership Development for Strategic Government Resources. Participants included Board Members, Scott Albert, Executive Director of RWRD, John Whitson, City Manager of Texarkana, TX, and Paige Alexander, reporter from *Texarkana Gazette*.

The Retreat Agenda was divided into six major sections:

1. Overview of Strategic Planning Process
2. Review and Discussion of Pre-Retreat Interviews with Board Members
3. Review and Discussion of Scott Albert's Meetings with Member Entities
4. Review and Discussion of RWRD's Primary Purposes
5. Discussion of the Board's Vision
6. Deliberation and Establishment of Strategic Goals for the Future

This report has been designed to give an overview of the decisions that were made at the meetings.

SGR Process of Strategic Visioning

SGR Philosophy of Long Range Planning

SGR's philosophy of long range planning is based upon 5 Pillars, and these pillars support and give structure to both the process and the product. This is a brief explanation of those pillars.

- **Pillar of Strategic Thinking**

The Board is responsible for thinking strategically about the future and developing an inspiring vision that creates excitement and establishes the direction for the organization as it moves toward the future. This is best accomplished in a retreat setting with a series of well-designed questions with professional facilitation which helps the Board engage in deep and meaningful discussions regarding the future.

- **Pillar of Business Analytics**

Good decisions demand good data. The more complex the issues are, and the longer term the horizon for the vision, the more critical it is to have good data with which to work. Good data is not enough: the organization needs to be capable of interpreting and analyzing the data, as well as communicating it in easy to understand and compelling ways. This input includes an accurate analysis of current and

anticipated trends, crucial issues, a fiscal forecast, the current comprehensive plan, and input from both staff and citizens.

- **Pillar of Strategic Execution by Staff**

Staff is responsible to develop the precise action plans to achieve the Board’s vision. These plans are developed in a feedback loop with the Board, so that there is a clear understanding of the Board’s vision, the mutually agreed upon goals, and the action plans to accomplish those goals.

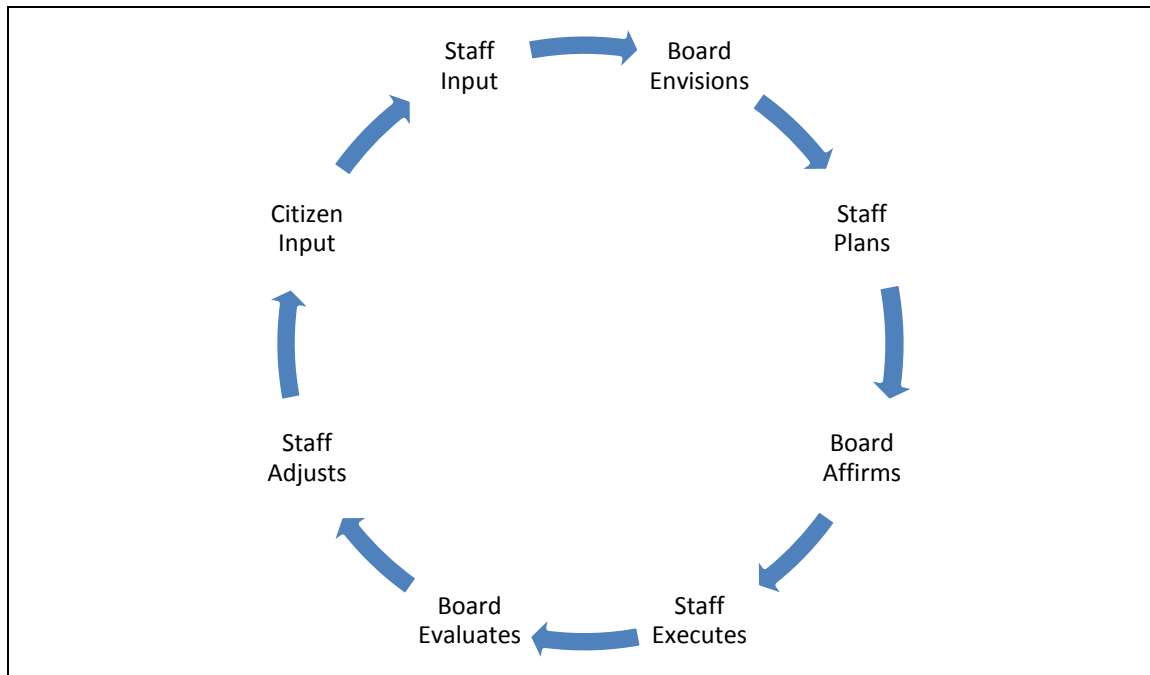
- **Pillar of Continual Alignment**

To translate it from dream into reality, the vision must be in alignment with the organization’s purpose, its core values, the master plan, as well as the real and perceived needs of the customers. In turn, the goals, the objectives, and the tasks must be in alignment with the vision. Creating alignment with the annual budget and the Strategic Vision is critical to empower the organization to accomplish the vision. Once alignment is developed, leaders must be diligent to maintain alignment, which includes continuous adjustment of the vision based on new information, changing situations and new insights.

- **Pillar of Communication and Feedback**

A constant flow of communication and feedback must be maintained between Board and staff in order to keep alignment, to evaluate performance, and make necessary adjustments due to changing factors. This enables the leadership to keep the vision relevant and empowering.

SGR CYCLE FOR STRATEGIC VISION



The process for this retreat was to engage the Board by introducing strategic questions designed to help them clarify their understanding of RWRD's Mission, Values, Vision, and Priorities. Sometimes these questions were discussed in small groups and reported on to the larger group. At other times, the discussions were held completely in the large group. As can be seen from the diagram above, this retreat focused mostly on the portion of the Cycle related to "The Board Envisions."

Core Values

The Board identified the following things as the core values that they intend to live by in regards to how RWRD operates internally and interacts externally with the public, stakeholders, and entities.

1. Abide by established agreements and enabling legislation
2. Build trust through communication and transparency
3. Provide excellent customer service
4. Lead regional water initiatives through positive action
5. Unify and represent the entities of the region fairly

Purpose

An important part of the retreat was to clarify the mission of RWRD. The Board determined that RWRD has three primary purposes, all of which need to be accomplished in order for RWRD to be successful.

1. Provide the governance structure for water resources that represents the region
2. Take the leadership of the regional water infrastructure issues facing the area
3. To protect the ownership and distribution of the water resources of the region

Exploring RWRD'S Purpose

The Board identified several key components for these purposes which help explain them more clearly.

Provide the Governance Structure that represents the Region

- Be the governing point person for the entire region as it relates to regional infrastructure for wholesale
- Assume the leadership and oversight of the "True UP" process and potable water rate
- Excel in communication
- Assume the roles outlined by the contracts and inter-local agreements
- Attempt to forge a bi-state district with Arkansas
- Create a plan and state it clearly and briefly
- Manage the water resources of the region
- Hold the water rights for the region
- Represent the region's water interests at the state and national level

Take the leadership of the regional water infrastructure issues facing the area

- Lead the way in the process for building a new water treatment plant
- Make use of the CH2MHill Study to determine the next steps that need to be taken

Protect the ownership and distribution of the water resources of the region

- Do this in a way that provides value to the customer
- Secure present and future water rights for the region
- Be the voice of the region in regards to water resources
- Accept the responsibility for creating the infrastructure systems necessary to protect the region's resources

Vision

The vision of RWRD is to provide quality water at an affordable price to the entire region.

The Pillars of this vision are:

- ▶ Water will be a positive aspect in this region
- ▶ Water will become a unifying force and catalyst for community
- ▶ Water will become an economic force
- ▶ RWRD will be seen as a model for excellence
- ▶ RWRD will be seen as a leader in bi-state cooperation
- ▶ RWRD will provide expanded services and have an expanded customer base
- ▶ RWRD will be seen as a model for Best Practices

Operational Drivers

The Board identified several things that they see as crucial issues regarding how they want RWRD to operate. Those things include:

- ▶ Be innovative and forward thinking
- ▶ Build sustainable state of the art facilities and oversee the operations
- ▶ Create a first rate organization with a staff that values quality and customer service
- ▶ Create channels for listening to the region and provide clear and effective leadership
- ▶ Excel in execution
- ▶ Implement the best practices in regards to long term planning
- ▶ Manage finances effectively
- ▶ Model regional cooperation
- ▶ Provide respected and recognized representation for the region
- ▶ Provide the highest quality water at a responsible rate

Reputational Drivers

The Board recognized that RWRD's reputation has not been highly regarded. The Board determined that to repair RWRD's reputation through their future actions. **"We are committed to changing our reputation by working toward a better future for the region. We believe that as we do that, our reputation will change."** These are some things that the Board discussed regarding how they want RWRD to become known:

- ▶ Riverbend had a reputation for being dysfunctional but we are going to become known for being functional and healthy.
- ▶ Riverbend had a reputation for controversy but we are going to become known for cohesiveness.
- ▶ Riverbend had a reputation for being sub-par but we are going to become known as the best Water District in the state.
- ▶ Riverbend had a reputation for being ineffective but we are going to become known as vibrant, relevant leaders.

To change RWRD's reputation, the Board recognizes that RWRD must build credibility with stakeholders. These are some of things that the Board identified as being important for developing credibility:

- ▶ Follow our contracts and accept our responsibility
- ▶ Produce results
- ▶ Be forthright
- ▶ Be an active leader in water issues, starting with addressing the WTP
- ▶ Recognize that we have been given authority, but we must assume responsibility
- ▶ Create a consensus to build something that will serve the needs of the entire region
- ▶ Provide equitable representation and fairness
- ▶ Be honest, fair, and transparent
- ▶ Forward-thinking actions that benefit the region throughout the future
- ▶ Always act with integrity
- ▶ Be problem-solvers

Milestones and Goals

The Board identified five significant milestones that they believed were crucial to fulfilling their purpose and vision. These are milestones that cannot be reached in one or two years. These are target areas that will likely take five or more years of concentrated effort. Nevertheless, beginning to pursue these milestones now will give RWRD direction and enable RWRD to be successful.

The Board ranked these milestones in terms of priority in this order:

- 1. Establishing the organization and budget of RWRD**
- 2. Building a new water treatment plant**
- 3. Educating the public on the role and purpose of RWRD**
- 4. Strengthening the RWRD presence within the region, state, and federal arenas**
- 5. Facilitating legislation to create a bi-state District**

Milestones and Target Areas

1. Establishing the organization and budget of RWRD

- Explore alternative revenue streams
- Continue to cultivate sustainable revenue
- Create a RWRD staffing needs plan
- Explore the ways to have member entities help with continued expenses

2. Building a new water treatment plant

- Create a plan for a new water treatment plant
- Determine how to proceed with the CH2MHill Report
- Create a plan for how to fund the water treatment plant
- Educate the public on the need for a water treatment plant in a way that creates buy-in
- Determine the governance and operations policies for the new plant

3. Educating the public on the role and purpose of RWRD

- Establish a Web Site that communicates policies, reports, and information
- Share RWRD's message—with a view toward the customer's needs and interests
- Continue to consistently seek out face to face opportunities to keep the public informed
- Build relationships with regional, state, and federal water entities

4. Strengthening the RWRD presence within the region, state, and federal arenas

- Work to increase RWRD's credibility with other water entities
- Prioritize the relationship and communication with member city councils
- Develop a strategic regional water plan for Riverbend Area and communicate it well

5. Facilitating legislation to create a bi-state District

- Develop a plan with Southwest Arkansas Water which member cities support
- Seek to develop it as a localized agreement rather than making it a state-wide initiative