

LAKE FOREST PARK CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Cover Sheet
Meeting Date: December 13, 2007
Study Session

<u>Title</u>	Final Report Recommendations for the City's Volunteer Advisory System	
<u>Originating Department</u>	Administration	
<u>Contact Person</u>	Tema Nesoff	
Attachments	Final Report	
Consent Agenda	Council Business	Final Action
	December 13, 2007	

Executive Summary

Strategic Learning Resources, Inc. (SLR) was hired by the City to evaluate the current Commission/Task Force system and make recommendations for a more effective volunteer system. Based on their findings and a review of Best Practices from other cities, SLR is recommending a change in the City's current commission system.

SLR recommends that over the next year (e.g., during 2008), Lake Forest Park phase in a new volunteer system that will address concerns raised by stakeholders by:

- Expanding opportunities for citizen engagement;
- Increasing the impact that citizen engagement will have on policy decisions; and
- Utilizing staff and human resources more efficiently.

Specifics on revising the system are in the attached report.

Background

During the summer and fall, SLR conducted interviews and focus groups of key stakeholders to determine their sense of strengths within the current system and possible changes that would strengthen the system. Consultants also conducted 'best practices' research within other cities, both local and national. The assessment process was guided by an Oversight Committee comprised of the Mayor, a City Council Member, two Commissioners, City Administrator and staff.

City of Lake Forest Park
Analysis of Volunteer Advisory Group System
Final Draft Report Summary
December 7, 2007

- I. **Background.** Strategic Learning Resources (SLR) was retained by the City of Lake Forest Park to conduct a brief assessment of the current commission system and taskforces and to provide options for a Volunteer Advisory System that is more effective and meets the needs of Lake Forest Park. The assessment took place over the past five months.
- II. **Methodology.** Guided by an Oversight Committee consisting of the Mayor, a Councilmember, two Commission members, the City Administrator and administrative staff, SLR conducted
- Key Informant interviews with the Mayor, eight Council members and three long-time volunteers.
 - Focus groups with Commission chairs, commission members, former council and commission members, block/crime watch and the staff leadership team.

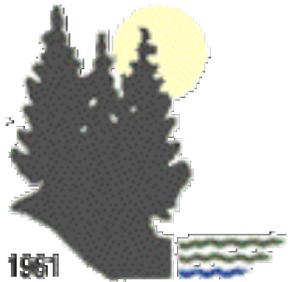
In addition, members of the Oversight Committee facilitated guided discussions with each of the Commissions and Task Forces.

- III. **Findings.** There was a high level of agreement among respondents that while volunteer involvement with city government was very valuable, the current system was not as effective as it should be. There was also general agreement on the issues of concern, which were:
- The purpose of the overall volunteer system is unclear and different people operate from different assumptions about that.
 - There is confusion about roles and responsibilities among volunteers and staff.
 - The support structure is unclear: process for creating and monitoring commission workplan and for reporting results is inconsistent.
 - There is a lack of communication protocols resulting in volunteer anxiety and misinterpretation.
 - There is no clear indication of when a Commission's job is done or to determine if they still represent the best use of staff time and city dollars.
- IV. **Best Practices.** Strategic Learning Resources examined eleven cities to assess ways in which other groups address issues facing Lake Forest Park and to determine what strategies others used to broaden their citizen engagement process and to make it more meaningful.
- V. **Recommendations.** Based on interviews and 'best practice' analysis, Strategic Learning Resources distilled four guiding principals:
- Elected officials, volunteers and citizens need to have a vehicle that allows them to share a common vision, or at least common goals.
 - A simple and clear support structure needs to be created that ensures that expectations are clear, that everyone's time is used optimally and that the work that is done adds value to the decision-making process.
 - The citizen involvement process needs to be more accessible and transparent to average citizens.
 - Mechanisms are needed to identify and tap into the expertise in the community in order to foster better policy outcomes

The three recommendations that derive from these principals are:

1. That the City of Lake Forest Park should continue to support the myriad volunteer opportunities that it provides for citizens and should look for ways to enhance those;
2. That the City of Lake Forest Park take steps to clarify (or develop) systems, reporting process and procedures so that volunteers—as well as elected officials and staff—are aligned around common goals;
3. That the current commission system be redesigned so that a) the system increases the opportunity of people to participate; b) the system adds more value to the city's decision making process and 3) the system uses resources wisely and well.

VI. Transition Plan. Strategic Learning Resources recommends that transition plan be created which refines the recommendations and implements the transition over the following year.



City of Lake Forest Park

Analysis of the Volunteer Advisory Group System

FINAL DRAFT REPORT

December 7, 2007



Submitted by:

Strategic Learning Resources, Inc.

P.O. Box 903 • Langley, WA 98260 • Phone: (360) 221-3401

I. Background

The City of Lake Forest Park retained Strategic Learning Resources to conduct a brief assessment of the current commission system and taskforces and to provide options for a Volunteer Advisory System that is more effective and meets the needs of Lake Forest Park.

The Mayor and City Council asked that this assessment be done because of their commitment to meaningful engagement of the community in government decision-making and a sense that there may be ways to use resources (human and financial) more effectively to accomplish that goal.

It is worth noting that since its incorporation in 1961, the City of Lake Forest Park has had a rich history of volunteer involvement and, in some ways, the City has been a victim of its own success. In significant part because of city leaders' commitment to citizen involvement, the volunteer citizen involvement system has grown dramatically. Unfortunately, absent a clear goal and plan for growth, the growth has been organic, with elements added as needs arose. There are currently eight commissions, five task forces, and various and sundry other committees and groups, to serve Lake Forest Park's 13,000 citizens.

II. Project Approach

Guided by an Oversight Committee consisting of the Mayor, one council member, the city administrator, two commissioners and staff (see Appendix A for Oversight Committee), Strategic Learning Resources took a two-pronged approach:

- 1) Gather information from key stakeholders to determine strengths and opportunities of the current system, and
- 2) Conduct a 'best practices' review of other cities' volunteer engagement systems to see what structures and strategies might exist that Lake Forest Park might draw from.

III. Findings of Stakeholder Conversations

Stakeholder Engagement Activities

The first step of the approach, gathering information from stakeholders, involved three activities:

- *Key Informant Interviews* with the Mayor, eight Council Members, and three long-time volunteers;
- *Focus Groups* with commission chairs, commission and task force members, former council members and commissioners, block watch/crime watch, and the staff leadership team; and
- *Discussion Groups* conducted by Oversight Committee members within each Commission and Task Force.

Findings

Out of the interviews and focus groups came a high level of agreement about issues. To be sure there were differences, mostly about the *causes* of problems, but in the main, the concerns raised by elected officials were essentially the same as those raised by commissioners and others.

Following is an overview of the findings.

1. *Volunteers and Elected Officials felt that the City benefits greatly from having citizens involved*
 - ✧ Volunteers feel good to be of service, feel as though they make a difference, provide expertise that saves tax dollars, and provides linkages to other organization and potential resources.
 - ✧ Elected Officials appreciate the additional perspectives, the availability of expertise, the increased knowledge of community issues and the fact that there have been significant accomplishments that were a result of Commission/Task Force input.
2. *Unclear Purpose of Volunteer System*
 - ✧ No clearly stated purpose related to volunteer/citizen involvement.
 - ✧ General lack of specificity in charge to Commissions (much greater clarity in mandated commissions and in Task Forces).
3. *Confusion about Roles and Responsibilities*
 - ✧ Inadequate volunteer training (both initial and ongoing) re content area, city process and expectations.
 - ✧ Staff roles are unclear (how directive should they be) and staff are unclear of the relative priority of staffing Commissions vs. their other job responsibilities.
4. *Incomplete or Inadequate Support Structure*
 - ✧ The current system has evolved without a clear articulation of purpose and goals.
 - ✧ Process for identifying workplan elements (charge) is unclear and varies depending on topic.
 - ✧ Process for reporting results is unclear.
 - ✧ Dimensions of staff support role are unclear and inconsistent.
5. *Inconsistent Communication*
 - ✧ Lack of clear, well understood communication protocols leads to volunteers not certain what, when, to whom or whether to communicate.
 - ✧ Lack of communication protocol results in misinterpretation and misguided assumptions about intentions.
6. *Infrastructure*
 - ✧ No clear indication of when a Commission's job is done led many people to recommend more reliance on Task Forces.
 - ✧ Merging Commissions was proposed as a way to use resources more effectively and accomplish more.

IV. Findings of Best Practices Research

Research Parameters and Methods

Strategic Learning Resources researched Best Practices in two areas of citizen engagement:

- 1) Operations of formal commissions/boards/committees; and
- 2) Techniques for doing broad community outreach.

With limited resources, the method of research was to use the Internet and follow up by phone with promising cities to get additional information.

Best Practices in Operating Relationships between Cities and Volunteer Commissions, Boards, and Committees

Regarding operations of formal commissions/boards/committees, we looked at seven cities, some local and some not, including:

- Gresham, OR
- Brookings, SD
- Germantown, TN
- Issaquah, WA
- Redmond, WA
- Woodinville, WA
- Mercer Island, WA

In determining the best fit with the City of Lake Forest Park, we evaluated six areas:

- 1) Do Commissions have workplans approved by City Council or equivalent?
- 2) Is there an explicit connection between the workplan and Council priorities?
- 3) Are there staff performance measures related to staff work with Commissions?
- 4) Are staff provided training (advance or in-service) related to working with volunteers?
- 5) Is there formal volunteer orientation/training?
- 6) Does the city have a regular method for engaging the general population in issues related to city government?

The matrix on the next page summarizes the data. It is important to note that no one has the 'ideal system' and, like Lake Forest Park, most cities' volunteer programs have evolved incrementally. Interestingly, many cities are undertaking assessments similar to Lake Forest Park.

Lake Forest Park Assessment of the Volunteer Advisory System – Best Practices

City	Pop.	Form of Government	Formal Boards/ Commissions	Workplan Approved by Council	Link between Workplan and Council Priorities	Staff Evaluated on Commission Work	Staff Training related to Working w/Volunteers	Formal volunteer training	Regular method for public input
Lake Forest Park, WA	13,000	Elected Mayor. Seven council members. City Administrator.	Eight commissions, seven task forces and several other groups	No	No	No	No	Manual; inconsistent training	No
Gresham, OR	100,000	Elected mayor; Mayor serves as 7 th council member. City manager has administrative authority and reports to council	One Commission (Planning—required by law) Also 13 Advisory Comms, including Cit. Inv.Comm.	Yes	Yes	No	No	Legal Training via City Attorney; written guidelines; content via staff; no process training	Annual survey, 400 random sample. Broad Q of L survey
Issaquah, WA	18,000	Elected Mayor, Seven Council members	Several. Commissions, Boards and Council Committees	No	No, but any action has to be consistent with Comp. Plan	No	No, except individual supervisors may have	Yes. Primarily legal, less about volunteer, electeds, staff roles	Some surveys; town meetings more or less biennial
Woodinville, WA	11,000	Council/City Manager (Council elects Mayor from among council members)	Five Commissions + Tree Board and Citizen Advisory Panels	Yes	Yes	Discretionary	Yes	Yes. Primarily legal, less about volunteer, electeds, staff roles	Occasional Surveys
Redmond, WA	50,000	Elected Mayor. Seven Council members	Ten Commissions, Boards and Panels	No, staff guides workplan so reflects Mayor priorities	No	No	No	fairly high level/informal	Occasional Surveys; open houses
Mercer Island, WA	22,000	Council/manager form of government	Four Commissions; six Boards	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes-related to biennial budget process
Brookings, SD	18,500	Elected mayor; Mayor serves as 7 th council member. City manager has administrative authority and reports to council	14 Boards and Commissions	Not formally but goals are shared and Council re-views Commissions' annual repts.	Implicit via staff	No. (commission work is 'under the radar')	No, except Library which uses many vols.	No	Just starting process of spring and fall town meetings; spring for budget and fall for 'other'
Germentown, TN	37,500	Board of Mayor and Alderman; City Manager	18 Boards and Commissions	Yes	Based on Long Range Strategic Vision	No	Yes, "taken into consideration"	No	Not regular; did it as part of strategic plan some years ago

Best Practices in Citizen and Community Engagement

SLR also looked at cities that have been identified as having highly effective ways of engaging their general population. We focused on this area because the Lake Forest Park stakeholders we interviewed suggested that citizens and elected officials alike would appreciate having a systematic way for the City to interact with a broader cross-section of the community. Among those cities that regularly interact with their citizens, there are many different goals and a wide range of strategies. What follows are summaries of strategies used by some cities to engage their communities.

Davenport, Iowa. (Population 100,000)

Takeaway: Citizen involvement in Davenport is integral to, not separate from, financial decision making. Citizens are involved at the front end of the budget process and there is an opportunity both to inform and be informed by the citizens before issues.

Detail: Davenport's Citizen Based Budgeting (CBB) process allows citizens to affect the budget and allows the city to educate citizens about various financial challenges. The budget process has five steps (evaluation, education and feedback, budget development, budget implementation, monitoring and reporting). During the evaluation phase, the city conducts a survey and focus groups to assess quality of services and to identify key issues for discussion in phase two, education and feedback. The city then hosts a series of forums - called 'Community Connectors' - to present the survey results and further discuss issues raised in the surveys. The Community Connectors are also opportunities for the city to explain and inform the community about financial challenges. Department heads use the information from the survey and forums to develop base budgets and work with Council to develop the final budget.

Dayton, Ohio. (Population 160,000)

Takeaway: Dayton has a strong system of neighborhoods and these neighborhood councils (called Priority Boards) have a key role in city strategic planning, defining the quality of life indicators that determine the future of the city.

Detail: Dayton has a long-established system of citizen participation through its seven neighborhood councils, called Priority Boards. This neighborhood planning structure has been in place since 1967, Dayton's Model Cities days, but has been reinforced recently to act as the first step in Dayton's strategic planning process, CitiPlan 2020. These Priority Boards selected a set of Quality of Life Indicators to serve as goals and statistical backdrop for the strategic plan. The six Quality of Life indicators were:

- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Youth, Education and Human Services
- Open Space and Quality of Life
- Downtown
- City Services

Kuna, Idaho. (Population 11,500)

Takeaway: Kuna has used deliberative democracy to engage citizens on issues as they arise. Working through a separate (but informally connected) nonprofit, they use Forums to set parameters and study circles to better understand issues and to develop solutions. Anyone can suggest topics and often the topics are suggested by the city.

Detail: The Kuna Alliance for a Cohesive Community Team (Kuna ACT) was formed in 1999 to foster better communication between citizens and local government about issues surrounding growth and school funding. Kuna, 18 miles south of Boise, has grown from about 2000 residents in 1990 to over 12,000 today with the population expected to double again by 2020. Because of the major issues that resulted from the rapid growth, there was little agreement and much contentiousness about the best way for the city to manage change. Out of this grew Kuna ACT. When a major policy decision arises, Kuna ACT, an independent nonprofit, organizes an informal forum followed by small study circles. Public officials often make presentations at the Forum and participate in the circle discussions. Indeed, public officials often request that study circles be formed to give them an opportunity to interact with citizens around key issues. Feedback is gathered by Kuna ACT coordinator and submitted to the city council, school board and other related policy groups.

Syracuse, NY. (Population 150,000)

Takeaway: Surveys alone are not very good indicators of citizen satisfaction since citizens may not know much about the service they are asked to assess. To have more than superficial review by citizens, it is important to provide some information/ education.

Detail: The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University established the Community Benchmark Program (CBP) in the late 90's. With funds provided by the Sloan Foundation, the Maxwell School attempted to identify key city services and establish baseline performance data for those services. They identified five performance areas: Crime Control, Fire Protection, Parks: Safety and Maintenance, Solid Waste Collection, Street Conditions: Maintenance and Snow Removal. As part of their benchmarking they asked citizens to indicate their level of satisfaction with the services. While the reported level of satisfaction was very high, it was also found that there was very little knowledge on the part of citizens about what the issues were or how they related to resources utilization, etc.

In our recommendations, below, we suggest that the new process significantly increase the degree and quality of broad community engagement. There are many specific issues to consider and tools to use when integrating the community into the decision making process and more work will be required to determine the best approach for Lake Forest Park. The examples above provide some sense of the kinds of things that are possible.

V. Recommendations

Purposes of Community Engagement

There are three reasons to engage the community:

1. To create alignment between citizens and elected officials regarding the future of Lake Forest Park;
2. To provide a vehicle for the community to be aware of and engaged in priority setting and policy guidance; and
3. To provide a way for the City to tap into and effectively utilize the experience and knowledge that exists in the community.

Principles of Community Engagement

Based on interviews of Lake Forest Park stakeholders and review of cities whose experience with citizen engagement has been successful, several principles emerge that will serve as a frame for recommendations:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| <i>Principle One</i> | Elected officials, volunteers and citizens need to have a vehicle that allows them to share a common vision, or at least common goals. |
| <i>Principle Two</i> | A simple and clear support structure needs to be created that ensures that expectations are clear, that everyone's time is used optimally and that the work that is done adds value to the decision-making process. |
| <i>Principle Three</i> | The citizen involvement process needs to be more accessible and transparent to average citizens. |
| <i>Principle Four</i> | Mechanisms are needed to identify and tap into the expertise in the community in order to foster better policy outcomes. |

Recommendations

The City of Lake Forest Park is justifiably proud of its commitment to citizen involvement and its belief that providing opportunities for residents to be involved not only brings new ideas and expertise but also strengthens a sense of connectedness that is at the heart of community. There are many, many things that the City currently does to involve citizens that we believe should continue and even be strengthened.

In addition, we believe that it is possible to create opportunities for even greater citizen involvement in helping the City address emerging issues and concerns by designing a system that is flexible enough to respond to changing priorities and to tap more of the community's knowledge and expertise.

Recommendation 1. Continue the excellent job of providing opportunities for residents to participate in projects and tasks that enhance the quality of the community.

Currently, in addition to the opportunities for citizen input at the beginning of Council Meetings, the City actively seeks citizen perspectives in a number of ways. Examples include:

- Community surveys are conducted annually on a number of topics;
- Project specific Task Forces are formed;
- Open Houses, Forums and Public Meetings are held on a number of topics throughout the year;
- Various work projects, such as Ivy Out, and specific work parties;
- Youth Council

Precisely because these activities are short term and meet a clear community need, they are important to the quality of life of Lake Forest Park and should be continued.

Moreover, the City should consider other tools and techniques for engaging citizens around defined, time-limited issues. For example, the City might identify and interview specific citizens with particular expertise or perspective or conduct focus groups where members of specific groups or cross sections of people are asked to respond and give input on a particular issue.

There is also a need and a desire for citizen participation to help the City understand and better respond to more complex issues confronting the City. We believe that the Commission system, as it is currently operated, does not provide the best opportunity for citizen engagement around key driving issues. We believe it lacks a clear sense of purpose, owned and understood by all its stakeholders, and it lacks an effective support structure. The following two recommendations will result in better use of time (elected officials, staff and volunteers), more citizen involvement, and greater utilization of volunteer input in developing public policy.

Recommendation 2. Support Structure

Create a simple, clear support structure that allows all stakeholders to feel as though they are ‘pulling together’, and that results in resources being used as effectively as possible. Action steps related to the creation of the needed structure include:

- Create a process for identifying “ends” (“Lake Forest Park Priorities for the Future”). The idea here is that there needs to be a common goal or target that people are working together to accomplish. There are several ways to do this ranging from conducting a survey and publicizing the results to conducting forums to engaging the community in a comprehensive, multi-year strategic planning process. Some cities couple this process with their City performance measurement process and engage citizens in deciding what performance goals should be. ***At a minimum, there needs to be a way for citizens and leaders to have a common sense of direction for the City.***
- Create a process for workplan development. There are several ways that cities accomplish this. One way is to have the commission (or other ‘volunteer group’) work in partnership with staff to develop the draft workplan that is then approved by council and mayor. (See Recommendation Two, below, for our suggestion of how Lake

Forest Park might accomplish this.) ***The key is that there is an agreed-to plan that everyone is working from; this will increase satisfaction, accountability and effective use of staff and financial resources.***

- Establish clear expectations for volunteers. Just having clear milestones laid out in the workplan will go a long way to helping clarify expectations. In addition, some cities have clear statements of the role definitions of volunteers, elected officials and staff. In some cases, there is a written statement that lays out volunteer roles and cities require volunteers to sign the document to show that they have indeed read it. ***It is important to all that volunteers are clear what they are signing up for. This clarity saves time, money and relationships.***

- Provide structured staff support to volunteer entities. Every successful volunteer program, committee, task force or group needs to be staffed. The failure to provide for adequate staff time up front will result in wasted time, difficulty in reaching objectives and, often, frustration among volunteers. In order to assure that staff is able to provide effective support, several things need to be in place.
 - There needs to be clarity for staff about what is expected of the commission (volunteer entity) and what the staff role is in accomplishing that;
 - There needs to be sufficient time for staff to accomplish those responsibilities;
 - There needs to be a way to hold staff accountable for meeting expectations and for rewarding accomplishment;
 - There needs to be training for staff on how to work effectively with volunteers in an environment that encourages partnership.

To accomplish these results, we would recommend:

- Create a structure so staff are in key role as partner with volunteer chair in accomplishing the workplan;
- Establish performance measures for staff that acknowledge and reward effective work with volunteers
- Provide training, both initial and ongoing, that assists staff in working with volunteers.

In sum, it is essential that workplans be clear so that it is possible to estimate staff (and volunteer) time required to accomplish the work and that sufficient staff time be allocated to do the job. It is false economy to keep roles vague and provide insufficient staff time.

Recommendation 3. Volunteer System Redesign

Redesign the volunteer system so that: 1) the system adds value to the City's decision making process; 2) many (perhaps most) citizens have the opportunity (and are aware that they have the opportunity) to learn about issues and present their perspective; and 3) the system uses resources wisely and well, recognizing the relatively small size of the budget and the competing priorities.

Strategic Learning Resources believes that Lake Forest Park has an opportunity to greatly enhance the number of citizens that are involved by creating a system that is flexible and responsive to more people. We believe there is much expertise in the community that does not get tapped because, currently, the only way for a resident to offer that expertise is through commission membership, which means committing to several years of participation.

System needs to provide greater opportunity for Citizens to provide input

Redesigning the volunteer system will involve a number of actions, including:

- Reduce Commissions to two required by State statute. There is a clear difference between the Commissions required by State law and the other ‘commissions’. This creates confusion and misunderstanding at all levels and results in inefficient (and therefore costly and confusing) process. Also, the current designation of ‘commission’ to several volunteer committees gives the impression that they ‘exist for life’ making it hard to change the system in response to changes in the environment.
- Develop a process for broad citizen engagement in developing “ends” (“Lake Forest Park Priorities for the Future”). Following is a suggestion for how that might look:
 - Mayor/Council/Staff identify three “Priorities for the Future” as a working draft;
 - Mayor/Council/Staff take draft “Priorities...” to the community. This should involve several vehicles both passive (e.g., website reaction) and active (forums, town hall meetings, etc.). This would also provide opportunities for interface with other community stakeholders such as civic groups, faith communities, etc.;
 - Staff sorts and collates data, submits to Mayor and Council in the form of a plan with three initiatives; and
 - Council adopts plan.
- Create Priority Planning Teams. These Priority Planning Teams (PPT) would be organized around the three initiatives contained in the **Lake Forest Park Priorities for the Future**. Inasmuch as there will likely be considerable content overlap between those initiatives and the topics of current commissions, there will likely be ample opportunities for former commission members to participate. Responsibilities of the Priority Planning Teams (in partnership with staff) would be to:
 - Develop a draft workplan with deliverables and milestones;
 - Get workplan approved by Council;
 - Gather data required to respond to questions in workplan;
 - Use various tools to identify and tap into community expertise;
 - Interact with other community organizations (schools, senior centers, environmental groups, etc.) that have interest and knowledge;
 - Conduct forums, town meetings, etc., to both inform and be informed by the community

Priority Planning Teams respond to identified topics by doing research, by identifying and tapping community resources, (including subject experts and general public) and by analyzing and making meaning of the information .

The terms of the Priority Planning Team volunteers would depend on the timeframe of the planning process. It would seem to make sense that the term be two years with the possibility of reappointment if the Priority Planning Team's work needs to continue beyond the biennium.

Recommendation 3. Other Opportunities for Citizen Engagement

Recognizing that the Mayor and Council may encounter issues where it is important to get citizen input, there may well need to be other vehicles (besides the Priority Planning Teams) to accomplish that. We recommend that these situations be handled on a case-by-case basis and that staff identify the best strategy to meet that situation.

There are several strategies available to the City including:

- Surveys, which could be targeted to specific populations or to the community at large;
- Interviews of specific citizens with particular expertise or perspective;
- Focus groups where members of specific groups or cross sections of people are asked to respond and give input on a particular issue;
- Time limited Task Forces

Importantly, the decision regarding which strategy to use should be based on the following:

- Clear idea of what information is needed;
- Review of range of strategies (see above) to identify the one(s) that will provide the data needed at the least cost.

VI. Transition Plan

During 2008, Lake Forest Park will plan and implement a transition process that will move from the volunteer advisory system that currently exists to the new citizen involvement system. The transition plan needs to attend to the details of moving from one system to another while providing a clear and respectful ending for those who currently serve on a commission or task force. A preliminary draft of the transition plan will include the following core elements:

CORE ELEMENTS	TIMEFRAME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Appoint and convene Transition Oversight Committee (continuation of Volunteer Advisory System Assessment Oversight Committee) ➤ Finalize transition plan ➤ Design communication plan 	<i>January</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finalize Transition Oversight Committee work plan ➤ Finalize transition plan for each commission and task force 	<i>February</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Commissions and task forces begin phase out ➤ Hold recognition event for all members of commissions and task forces. 	<i>March</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Finalize vision and goal setting process 	<i>April - June</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Carry out summer citizen involvement ‘blitz’ to prepare the community to participate in the vision and priority setting process in the fall 	<i>July - August</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hold vision and priority setting session 	<i>September</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Recruit, appoint and train Priority Planning Team members 	<i>October-December</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Priority Planning Teams begin their work 	<i>January 2009</i>

**Appendix A:
City of Lake Forest Park
Analysis of the Volunteer Advisory Group System**

OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Mayor Dave Hutchinson

Council Member Steve Plusch

David Cline, City Administrator

Jackie Gardner, Environmental Quality Commission

Bud Bard, Public Safety Commission

Tema Nesoff, Staff

City of Lake Forest Park
Analysis of Volunteer Advisory Group System
Final Draft Report Summary
December 7, 2007

- I. **Background.** Strategic Learning Resources (SLR) was retained by the City of Lake Forest Park to conduct a brief assessment of the current commission system and taskforces and to provide options for a Volunteer Advisory System that is more effective and meets the needs of Lake Forest Park. The assessment took place over the past five months.
- II. **Methodology.** Guided by an Oversight Committee consisting of the Mayor, a Councilmember, two Commission members, the City Administrator and administrative staff, SLR conducted
- Key Informant interviews with the Mayor, eight Council members and three long-time volunteers.
 - Focus groups with Commission chairs, commission members, former council and commission members, block/crime watch and the staff leadership team.

In addition, members of the Oversight Committee facilitated guided discussions with each of the Commissions and Task Forces.

- III. **Findings.** There was a high level of agreement among respondents that while volunteer involvement with city government was very valuable, the current system was not as effective as it should be. There was also general agreement on the issues of concern, which were:
- The purpose of the overall volunteer system is unclear and different people operate from different assumptions about that.
 - There is confusion about roles and responsibilities among volunteers and staff.
 - The support structure is unclear: process for creating and monitoring commission workplan and for reporting results is inconsistent.
 - There is a lack of communication protocols resulting in volunteer anxiety and misinterpretation.
 - There is no clear indication of when a Commission's job is done or to determine if they still represent the best use of staff time and city dollars.
- IV. **Best Practices.** Strategic Learning Resources examined eleven cities to assess ways in which other groups address issues facing Lake Forest Park and to determine what strategies others used to broaden their citizen engagement process and to make it more meaningful.
- V. **Recommendations.** Based on interviews and 'best practice' analysis, Strategic Learning Resources distilled four guiding principals:
- Elected officials, volunteers and citizens need to have a vehicle that allows them to share a common vision, or at least common goals.
 - A simple and clear support structure needs to be created that ensures that expectations are clear, that everyone's time is used optimally and that the work that is done adds value to the decision-making process.
 - The citizen involvement process needs to be more accessible and transparent to average citizens.
 - Mechanisms are needed to identify and tap into the expertise in the community in order to foster better policy outcomes

The three recommendations that derive from these principals are:

1. That the City of Lake Forest Park should continue to support the myriad volunteer opportunities that it provides for citizens and should look for ways to enhance those;
2. That the City of Lake Forest Park take steps to clarify (or develop) systems, reporting process and procedures so that volunteers—as well as elected officials and staff—are aligned around common goals;
3. That the current commission system be redesigned so that a) the system increases the opportunity of people to participate; b) the system adds more value to the city's decision making process and 3) the system uses resources wisely and well.

VI. Transition Plan. Strategic Learning Resources recommends that transition plan be created which refines the recommendations and implements the transition over the following year.