

How Did the Town of Biscoe Plan In a Time of Uncertainty and Fear?

—TOWN OF—
BISCOE

“The Town of Biscoe, NC has historic challenges in long term planning. We were in unknown territory which created some uncertainty and fear.”

--Brandon Holland, ICMA-CM Town Manager

At the strategic planning board retreat, we sat at different tables with the smell of hand sanitizer in the air and the shared anxiety of not knowing what might come next. Despite this, the board developed consensus on four goals and then measurable objectives to meet these goals.



Brandon Holland, ICMA-CM
Town Manager

The Town of Biscoe’s strategic plan is particularly strong because it has already led to results, it sets the stage for the future, and its objectives work together synergistically despite great uncertainty. This article will illustrate this success with the examples of:

- Economic development, business support, and communication.
- Recreation.
- Uncertainty leading to creativity.

Economic development, business support and communication

How do we set the stage for the future when the future is so unknown?

The Board skillfully developed objectives to support the following goal: Increase economic development by being progressive, attracting business, and promoting growth. But how could this priority be addressed when it was challenging to set due dates and other measures?

The town’s objectives still have components that plan out strategically for both one year and three years. However, the town focused on creating objectives that concentrated on what they can control in the present since the future was so unknown. By working in the present, Biscoe established objectives that were written to be open and point toward future outcomes no matter what transpired.

Their strategic plan’s objectives in support of this priority can be summarized as: “reach out to business leaders utilizing a diverse array of methods”, “create an ongoing list of available land with prices” and “enhance the town’s online presence”.

The Town of Biscoe’s strategic plan is particularly strong because it has already led to results, it sets the stage for the future, and its objectives work together synergistically despite great uncertainty.



W. Eddie Reynolds, Mayor of Biscoe

Laura B. Morton the Town Clerk explains: “The objective about reaching out to and communicating with businesses, the objective on providing a list of available land, and the work on communication is proactive. We are providing a way for businesses to have information they need now and for new businesses to come”.

An initial result: Effective communication on information on the coronavirus

The objectives that are summarized above combined synergistically with discussions at the retreat on the best methods for communication between the staff and board, the board members themselves, and the government and the citizens have already led to results. For example, Brandon explains:

“One of the strengths of our board retreat, is that one thing we learned is how best to communicate with each other. This has already helped in communicating the

Governor's decrees and announcements, federal information, and other critical news internally as well as externally to businesses and the community".

Recreation

How do we enhance our recreation programming and hire a recreation director in uncertainty?

At the retreat, the Board decided they wanted to enhance the recreation offerings of the town and hire a full time recreation director. But how could this be accomplished in a time of great unpredictability? The Town of Biscoe accomplished this by interconnecting these three approaches:

- Creating objectives in a typical time-line like approach adapted to work with unknowns.
- Allowing for flexibility and empowerment while still providing overall guidance.
- Ensuring that there is a natural synergy in tactics.

It was not feasible to set a date or a time frame for the hiring of the recreation director. However, there were time-lines that could be established with future due dates.

The Town of Biscoe Board believes that benchmarking and a citizen survey are essential before designing a program and finding the right recreation director. In addition, the town manager stressed the importance of forming a recreation committee as it is needed to obtain funding and could help in the design and implementation of the survey. The Board thinks that there should be one commissioner on the committee.

The Board has allowed the design and implementation of the survey to be at the discretion of the recreation committee, yet it has provided the guidance that it should be posted on social media and the town's website, included in water bills, and distributed through religious organizations. The electronic survey work could begin relatively soon. The timing of tapping into religious organizations as an approach was left open-ended due to social distancing circumstances.

Simple adapted time frames: Often simple solutions are the best, especially when much is unknown.

Biscoe's timeline is:

- Benchmark other recreation programs by the end of November 2020.
- Establish a recreation committee that includes one commissioner by the end of November 2020.

This simple content, timeline, and guidance provides actions that will lead to the growth of the recreation program and the hiring of a recreation director whenever and however this happens.

Uncertainty leading to creativity

Brandon expressed that "this unique time provides a time for growth and creativity". At the retreat, challenges were addressed. However, the Board used the vast majority of time creatively finding positive ways to serve their citizens. The Town of Biscoe's strategic plan has already led to results and set the stage for the future with synergy between its objectives.

Eddie Reynolds, the Mayor of Biscoe, told me: "Despite these strange times, I still walk down the streets and talk with citizens (even if 6 feet away). I listen to their needs and respond the best I can". This statement to me is why we are all in this. I think this is what it is all about.

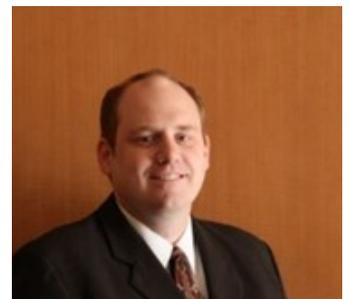
The Aycock Group helps governments, nonprofits and communities come to consensus on goals and objectives. Chris facilitates board retreats, larger strategic planning projects, multi-stakeholder projects and staff development. You can reach Chris at chris@theaycockgroup.com or 919.880.4704.

Despite these strange times, I still walk down the street and talk with the citizens (even if 6 feet away). I listen to their needs and respond the best I can".

– Mayor Eddie Reynolds



Laura B. Morton, NCCMC, CMC
Town Clerk



Chris Aycock, MPA
President, The Aycock Group

We needed a leader to guide the board of elected officials. Chris you were the leader we needed to guide us through unknown territory and get us there.

- Brandon Holland