

Reinventing a South Texas City

2018 TML Conference

Presented by: The City of Pearsall, Texas

October 10, 2018



Introductions

- Mayor Mary Moore
- Councilman Ben Briscoe
- Councilman Julian Hernandez
- Councilwoman Brenda Trevino
- Councilman Robert Villareal
- City Manager Charles “Tink” Jackson
- Not in Attendance
 - Councilmembers Mando Martinez and Toby Lopez Jr.,
Chris Valadez



Purpose

- The Pearsall City Council was selected by the Texas City Management Association as the 2018 City Council of the Year
- As part of the award, the City Council agreed to provide open discussions about how this group took the City of Pearsall from the struggling mess it was to setting examples for others at this session
- Outline specific things that made a big difference
- Provide ideas for positive change
- Answer questions



Ground Zero - State of the City

- ZERO confidence in local government
- Weekly negative news stories
- Knowledge of corruption practically throughout
- Lack of continuity in administration
- Failing Infrastructure
- Budgeting nightmares – Oil Boom
- No transparency or accountability



Beginning the Transformation

- Started with an Interim City Manager
- Hired a new Police Chief
- Hired a new City Attorney
- Hired a new City Manager
- Completed assessment of infrastructure
- Committed to essential values openly and loudly



Value 1 - Ethics

- Proposed 40 changes to the City Charter – all passed
- Paramount among the propositions were changes to the Ethics requirements held in the Charter
- Followed the passages of the propositions with passage of a zero tolerance Ethics Ordinance
- Re-established the City of Pearsall Ethics Commission
- Established and adopted policies specifically addressing how Council members will interact with each other, citizens and staff and implemented “rules of engagement” for interactions between Council Members

Ethics Demonstrated

- Zero tolerance ordinance to compliment Charter
- Seven alleged ethic violations filed against a long standing city council member by the City Manager
- Hearings were tense and politically charged
- Council upheld certain allegations despite the political nightmare that would follow
- Former Council Member sued the City for \$100,000
- Council held to their commitment and decision
- District Court confirmed Council decision



Value 2 – Public Welfare before Political Motives

- Passage of 2016 CO Bond to address numerous issues despite political ramifications.
 - Deferred Maintenance (the former political slogan)
 - Waste Water Treatment Plant operating at ≈25%
 - TCEQ Enforcement looming
 - Railroad Commission Enforcement looming
 - Numerous Lawsuits
 - Unpaid Utility Bills (\$500,000)
 - Streets in horrible shape



Public Welfare before Political Motives - Demonstrated

- WWTP at 96% operation levels today
- TCEQ is an advocate for the City now
- Railroad Commission skipped last audit of City
- All but 3 lawsuits have been cleared
- 2017 Council only faced one lawsuit – Ethics
- Collected over \$400,000 in past due utility bills
- 8 brand new street in town in highest traffic areas
- Numerous ordinances clarified – no variances granted



Value 3 – Functional Policy Making

- Comprehensive Plan needed, but work needed to be done immediately
- Understanding the role of the Council – policy making
- Workshops, workshops, workshops – knowledge and understanding is key
- Include the public in everything – not a focus of prior Councils
- Work with management to improve processes



Functional Policy Making - Demonstrated

- Without a standing Comp Plan, the Council held numerous workshops and forums to vet issues and include the public – work on the biggest issues started immediately.
- Council grasped their role – setting policy – and didn't interfere in daily operations – something new for city employees
- The public was included in everything, including Council ethics training, bond budget workshops, project prioritization, etc.
- Developed new “work order” process for dealing with all complaints for the public.



Value 4 – Prudent Financial Management

- The Problems -
 - Financial policies had to change
 - Council inherited NO reserves
 - The Oil Crash was still ongoing – the bottom was not known
 - Work had to be done immediately
 - Financial priorities were out of balance



Prudent Financial Management - Demonstrated

- Spending was cut to minimum levels
- Amnesty Ordinance was passed to collect past due utility debt
- User fees were adopted to finance half of the 2016 Bond
- Taxes were raised to offset a portion of lost oil boom revenue
- Vacant positions were cut and departments combined to balance budget
- Annexation work began



Value 5 – Support Professional Development

- The Council recognized that an investment needed to be made into training staff
- Council recognized that training dollars are recovered numerous times over in reduced lawsuits and improved processes
- Supported development through TML training
- Supported training locally



Support Professional Development - Demonstrated

- Council supports City Manager membership and participation in ICMA, TML, TCMA and TCMA Region 8 activities.
- Council supported increased budgetary requests for training for directors and staff.
- Council implemented the Texas Certified Public Managers Program Scholarship program which provides for 2 employees annually to receive the training and certification.
- Council supported internal trainings – staff retreats



Value 6 – Positive Relationships Among Council Members

- History showed an absolute lack of harmony between Council members
- Lack of harmony affected staff as well
- Lack of harmony affected continuity of operations
- Lack of boundaries within roles
- Lack of accountability when boundaries were crossed



Positive Relationships Among Council Members - Demonstrated

- Council implemented the “City Council Rules of Engagement”
- Council maintained a high level of respect and decorum towards each other and towards staff
- Council revamped the Ethics Ordinance to make it a “no tolerance” ordinance
- Council held firm to the standards they had set in times of political turmoil
- Removed the loopholes



Value 7 – Promoting Community Awareness and Relations

- Community had limited access to government in the past
- Citizens who attended meetings were ignored and bullied
- Zero outreach was done between the Council and the citizens
- No information was released to the press without a Open Records request
- Minutes were cryptic, ordinances left unsigned, contracts and vital documents were “lost”



Promoting Community Awareness and Relations - Demonstrated

- Council held numerous public forums, workshops and open meetings
- First ever General Community Forum was held
- First ever Business Forum was held
- First ever joint work session between City Council and County Commission was held
- Council promoted the use of social media to reach our citizens
- Started process to develop new City website



Value 8 – The Intangibles

- The timing was perfect
- So many years of sub-standard government provided the perfect opportunity for what was accomplished in 2017. The work started in 2015, continued in 2016 and the successes from those previous years lead to the pinnacle in 2017
- There was never a single discussion that mentioned a future election, it was always about what was needed NOW
- There was never a political motive that entered into any equation in 2017 – it was always “what is best”



Value 8 – Be The Light on the Hill

- Hurricane Harvey was projected to bring 24” of rain
- Pearsall was spared from the damaging rain, but faced an entirely different unpredictable challenge
- 1350 fellow Texans showed up in our city and moved into our motels overnight
- They had nothing with them but what they had on their backs as they fled the storm
- We knew we had to help them in every way we could, however, there was no plan for this challenge



Be The Light on the Hill - Demonstrated

- All of the things the 2017 Council had worked on were put into motion
- Social media was used to request donations for people that needed supplies – the informed public was called to action
- Council members and staff worked for weeks organizing donations and getting those supplies to the people that needed them
- We had the majority of the 1350 evacuees in Pearsall for 30 days, some as long as 60 days



Be The Light on the Hill – Demonstrated 2

- We provided truckloads of water, food, clothing, pet supplies, and children's items to the evacuees while they were in our city
- We sent trailer loads of the same to the coast
- We provided over \$10,000 in grants to those affected the hardest through donations received from citizens and other communities
- We provided access to computers and technical help to local motels to register as FEMA shelters and to our new family to register as affected parties
- Local businesses and churches jumped in and provided meals and additional services



Tying It All Together ...

- Mayor's Comments



