

San Mateo County Event Center Board of Directors Strategic Planning Meeting April 27, 2022

The planning portion of the Board of Directors meeting opened with a discussion of why strategic planning is important to an organization. The following was discussed:

Why Strategic Planning?

- The future is not what it used to be. Uncertainty, unpredictability, and the impacts of indecision are what we can count on.
- Cannot rely on what we have done in past to know how to survive in the future. The very core of the San Mateo County Event Center business model was uprooted by the pandemic.
- The cavalry is NOT coming! We must save ourselves.
- Strategic planning is a series of well thought out, researched and systematic decisions for the future, updated on a regular basis.
- It includes a process of assessing every aspect of operations, every asset, every relationship, every program to determine capacity to contribute toward San Mateo County Event Center achieving its goals.
- It is an opportunity to plan for the future as the SMCEC recovers from current pandemic related challenges.
- Amid crisis lies opportunity. The SMCEC has the opportunity to play a critical role in local response to crisis and in the local effort to revive and rejuvenate the community.

Expectations

Board members and staff were asked to share what they hoped to accomplish in the strategic planning process and sessions. Their answers included:

- To reframe who we are as the SMCEC, re-identifying the organization and develop a branding strategy and action plan.
- To create and develop a well-defined, strategic emergency response identity for the SMCEC.
- To discern what to continue to do as an organization and how to do it better.
- To offer support from the County Attorney's Office.
- To support cohesive, open communication amongst the board and staff.
- To discover ways to better promote SMCEC and our very diverse activities.
- To establish goals that stretch us beyond our current capacity.
- With an eye to our history, identify where we are going as an organization to face today's needs as well as future needs.
- The board members represent special talents and experience, and we need to take advantage of our collective strengths.
- To develop a 5-Year plan that puts SMCEC in a leadership position in our community.

- Find balance between the expo center business and the annual fair. To be known as an open, inclusive gather place for the community.
- To plan for managing change.
- Evaluate our mission, vision, and purpose statements and to set direction for the future.
- Dive more into diversity and inclusion and how to be more to our community.
- To be more inviting to students.
- To be creative in ways to use the property and facilities for the entire county.
- To tell our story more effectively, communicating through the media sources.

Assessing Who We Are and SMCEC's Role in the Community

Facilitator Bailey-Findley made a presentation on how SMCEC specifically plays an important role in the community. She used the findings of Joel Kotkin who wrote the book *The City*, to explain how a fairgrounds and the SMCEC are considered “sacred places” within a community. Professor Kotkin’s premise is:

Since the beginning of time, humans have a universal need to organize themselves. There is a universal longing for community, belonging, joy, beauty, connection with our past and meaning.

Humankind’s greatest creation has always been its cities. Since its early origins, cities have performed three separate, critical functions for its inhabitants and the health of a city is determined by the success of these functions:

- 1) The inclusion of sacred place;
- 2) The ability to provide security and project power;
- 3) The host for a commercial market.

Sacred places in our cities are those treasured places that evoke a sense of memory, connectivity, and wisdom. For many cities or collection of cities such as a county or region, the fair or fairgrounds serves as a sacred place. Think of your local fairgrounds as you read the following description of sacred places.

A Place is considered sacred if it is:

A Place of Status

- ✚ A place of importance and significance to the people. It must be a meaningful gathering place.

A Place that is Foundational to the Community.

- ✚ A place upon which a community is built. All elements of meaning to the community can be found at this place:
 - Social well-being
 - Safety and Security
 - Learning and Growth
 - Tradition and Ritual
 - Economic Sharing

- Equal-Opportunity Interaction

A Place that Provides Identity to the Community

- ✦ A place that shares and creates stories and vision that shape who we are in the community.

A Place with a Wisdom Tradition

- ✦ A place where stories and experiences help us answer the questions:
 - What is real?
 - How should we live?

Fairs and fairgrounds serve as sacred places for the community, in very human ways. We are endowed with a stewardship to ensure that they remain treasured and sustain the health and wellbeing of community life.

Clarity of Purpose

Following the presentation, the board discussed the *Purpose* of the San Mateo County Event Center.

The purpose of the SMCEC is:

- The reason the SMCEC exists.
- The reason for personal involvement. Why are you doing this work?
- What is the cause uniting the organization?
- What is the fairgrounds championing through its contributions, service, good works?
- Leading with purpose – how the organization’s values are lived.

They also reviewed sample Purpose statements from other organizations, including other CA fairs.

Through an exercise, the board members shared concepts about the fair, fairgrounds, and event center that represent significant meaning to them personally. These concepts include:

- ★ Providing a place where joy, laughter, belonging can occur for everyone.
- ★ Being an organization that responds immediately, generously, and exceptionally to immediate needs of its community, during times of emergency or crisis.
- ★ Playing a role in family traditions and supporting generational interaction and memorable experiences.
- ★ Serving as a place of learning where a person can progress in a safe environment, learning new skills, developing talents, and growing as a responsible human.
- ★ A place that encourages, motivates, inspires people to be their best self.
- ★ A place that provides access to incredible people, extraordinary experiences, beauty, and excellence.

- ★ A place where one can belong and feel a part of the community and the larger good.
- ★ Representing “home” and “wholesomeness” for the community.
- ★ Providing new experiences, innovation, and imagination in an inclusive, friendly manner, allowing our community to accept change in a healthy, positive manner.
- ★ To support causes that are important to our community members and allow for fundraising and educational outreach.
- ★ Creating unique, exceptional experiences to be shared with others.
- ★ A place where I can be the #1 Auntie!

The current tag line for the SMCEC is:

Where tradition meets innovation.

The board discussed a revised tag line that depicts the *Purpose* of the SMCEC. Some ideas included:

- ↳ SMCEC where ALL can gather for fun and growing.
- ↳ A place of incredible people, extraordinary experiences, and exceptional achievement.
- ↳ SMCEC is our place of safety that is reliably present in good times and times of emergency.
- ↳ SMCEC comes to the aid of its neighbors.
- ↳ Where learning and exploration brings neighbors together.
- ↳ A place of fun, unique, exceptional experiences so that our people can connect.

Where Do We Want to Go?

The board identified critical issues facing SMCEC’s future and set direction for the future.

Critical Issues

- a. Protecting and preserving the open gathering space of the fairgrounds.
- b. Communicating our value to the community. Telling our story in such a way that we communicate effectively our purpose, our value and the benefits provided by the SMCEC to the community.
- c. Serving as an emergency response center for the region, upgrading facilities, equipment and training to meet the need.
- d. Being the stewards of fair time tradition, events and activities.
- e. Addressing infrastructure and facility upgrades. Securing funding and creating a plan for investing in our facilities and grounds.
- f. Dealing with ongoing uncertainty and unpredictability. Learning to swivel and continue to provide reliable, consistent service to our community.
- g. Addressing organizational development, succession planning, leadership development and ways to attract and retain staff talent.
- h. Stabilizing our financial position and making use of our organizational strengths for continuous improvement.

- i. Securing funding for dynamic response. Making meaningful relationships that enhance mutual benefit and working collaboratively at the local, state, and federal levels.
- j. Managing change and providing a culture of resilience and responsiveness. Passionately serving our community in ways that may be unforeseen in the present.

Direction Statements

1. Communicating energetically and thoroughly to tell the story of SMCEC and the beneficial value to the community.
2. Serving as an emergency resiliency center and space, investing in capital improvements and equipment for this purpose.
3. Building advantageous and productive relationships, bringing ALL people “under the tent.”
4. Unifying the brand of SMCEC.
5. Incorporating tradition in our planning.
6. Developing a business plan that ensures future stability, resiliency, and good stewardship of the SMCEC.

Conclusion: Next Steps

As the planning portion of the meeting came to an end, the board identified next steps in their strategic planning process.

Action Step	By Whom	By When
Prepare and distribute the minutes of the planning session.	Becky + Charlene	Third week in May
Create a plan for continuing the strategic planning process, including additional meetings later in the year.	Board’s Exec. Committee with CEO	Present to full board at May Board meeting
Have an additional facilitate session to further develop the strategic plan.	CEO to establish date & logistics	Target July or August.

Evaluation of the Planning Meeting

What worked well?	What Could Be Better?
Having the planning meeting facilitated.	Evaluate whether to include the planning portion of the meeting with a regularly scheduled board meeting or have a separately scheduled planning meeting.
Loved meeting in person!	Separate the planning portion of the meeting from day-to-day business.
Comfortable, conducive space.	Try to make the space smaller, more intimate.
Great materials provided to the board.	Remember an easel next time.
Great attendance by the board.	

All present were attentive and participated well.	
Appreciate the meal!	