



# CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

March 4, 2021

The City Council of the City of Mesa held a Strategic Planning Session at the Mesa Arts Center, Piper Theater, 1 East Main Street, on March 4, 2021 at 8:08 a.m.

## COUNCIL PRESENT

John Giles  
Jennifer Duff  
Mark Freeman  
Francisco Heredia  
David Luna  
Julie Spilsbury  
Kevin Thompson

## COUNCIL ABSENT

None

## OTHERS PRESENT

Kristin Darr

## OFFICERS PRESENT

Christopher Brady  
Dee Ann Mickelsen  
Jim Smith

## STAFF PRESENT

Andrea Alicoate  
Scott Bouchie  
Scott Butler  
Marc Heirshberg

## STAFF PRESENT (Cont.)

Mike Kennington  
Jill Kotsur  
Natalie Lewis  
Jeff McVay  
Randy Policar  
John Pombier

### 1. Mayor's welcome and introduction.

Mayor Giles reflected on what the City has been through in the past year. He stated in his meeting yesterday with Mesa Public Schools (MPS) Education Foundation, it dawned on him that the last time he attended that meeting Gaye Kelley was conducting the meeting which is a sobering reminder of what occurred last year. He added at the same time there have been some silver linings and lessons learned. He commented that everyone, both individually and collectively as a city, should reflect on the tragedies of last year, but also encouraged a positive takeaway of how to be better people and a better organization.

Mayor Giles discussed a painting that hangs in the entryway of his home of a woman standing in a field holding an umbrella watering the plants in the rain. He explained the irony of the painting hit him a few months ago and he compared it to if Council wants to be successful as a city, or individually, Council cannot be inside when it is raining but

must be outside planning and preparing for the days ahead. He acknowledged the City is in the midst of some tough times and could sit back and do nothing, but it is more important to be prepared for what is coming next. He noted that in some ways the City of Mesa (COM) is doing better than ever and are posed right now to make a giant leap forward. He thanked everyone for their part in responding to the crisis.

2. City Manager's review of the purpose of the Strategic Planning Session.

City Manager Christopher Brady recognized Council for making the tough decisions for the community and appreciates what Council contributes to the community. He mentioned it has been a tough year and while most items discussed at last year's strategic planning session have been pushed to the side, he is proud of what has been accomplished together with Council and staff, and how staff have responded. He stated the items discussed last year became irrelevant and today's purpose is to go back to those items and talk about the what, the why, maybe the how, and establish the values that will inform staff how to move forward. **(See Attachment 1)**

Mr. Brady presented the strategic priorities that are available on the website, which have evolved over time. He indicated today's exercise will be a fresh look at the priorities with the goal of looking at the bigger picture on what drives the values of the community and at the end of the day the previous and new priorities can be compared and reassessed.

Mr. Brady introduced Kristin Darr, facilitator for the discussion on City Council Strategic Priorities.

3. Participate in a facilitated discussion to establish a shared vision and direction relating to the current and future City Council Strategic Priorities. City Council facilitated discussion topics on the Strategic Priorities will include, but are not limited to:

- 3-a. What 2020 taught the Council and the City that should be considered in future plans.
- 3-b. What is important to move Mesa forward in the next two to four years or beyond.
- 3-c. Why stated goals/priorities are important to City Council and the community.
- 3-d. How the City Council can help move stated goals forward.
- 3-d. Areas of common agreement on the priorities of the City Council.

Ms. Darr stated the strategic priorities are important to keep in mind as the conversation proceeds today because those priorities will be revisited at the end to share Council's impressions. She pointed out the purpose of the session is to talk about the ideas Council wants to champion as a group. She mentioned the Strategic Planning session is an annual opportunity for Council to think collectively about the citywide impact and what is important.

Ms. Darr described the interactive polling tool that will be utilized to during the session and encouraged Council to provided multiple answers to the questions to gather

everyone's thoughts. She explained the discussion today will include a small portion of the valuable context from what was learned in 2020, as well as Mesa now and moving forward.

Ms. Darr posed the question to Council, "What was a valuable lesson learned in 2020?" and Council's responses included the following:

- Strength is gained through weaknesses
- Collectively, anything can be accomplished
- The City of Mesa has amazing staff and is resilient
- Vision for one district is not shared by all districts
- The world does not stop
- The City of Mesa is resilient
- Focuses include relationships, service, digital divide, connections

Ms. Darr asked Council to answer the question, "What were you most proud of Mesa for in 2020?" and the responses included the following:

- Working with and feeding community members affected by the pandemic
- Mesa CARES Program
- Mesa continued moving forward and came up with creative solutions to solve problems
- The response to the pandemic by Council and City staff
- The City of Mesa exemplifies compassion, action, flexibility, teamwork, innovation, caring, reaction, leadership, and progress

Ms. Darr carried the conversation forward to what needs to be done moving forward and what is Mesa currently doing. She presented the question, "What is Mesa known for?" and summarized the feedback from Council to include:

- Strong, vibrant community
- Quality of life
- Great schools, parks, and neighborhoods
- Big city with small hometown feel
- Museums and arts programs
- Infrastructure

Ms. Darr asked Council to answer the question, "What are our strengths?" and outlined the responses as follows:

- Financially sound
- Leadership
- Planning infrastructure for economic development
- Working collaboratively to address issues
- Great City staff

Ms. Darr requested Council address the question, "What are our weaknesses?" and compiled the responses as follows:

- Communication
- Homelessness
- Digital divide
- Slow to respond to development needs
- Lack of diversity
- Public Safety not keeping pace with the population growth
- Negative perception

Ms. Darr compiled the list of strengths and explained the weaknesses are characterized as things to address such as homelessness, communication, infrastructure, and diversity. She mentioned the list of items will help Council when discussing ideas for what the City wants to do in the next year, the next five years, and beyond. She queried Council on items missing from the list that need to be added.

Mayor Giles commented words that should be added are environment and education. He pointed out that Council has had recent conversations about committing to recycling and exploring a climate action plan as an organization, as well as creating more partnerships within the education arena.

Vice Mayor Duff identified areas that need to be addressed within the community are the digital divide and affordable or attainable housing.

Councilmember Thompson noted if the City works on creating the conditions that will produce jobs, then people will be able to afford housing. He feels raising wages and bringing higher wage jobs to Mesa will then support the housing piece.

Councilmember Heredia communicated the City is still dealing with the pandemic and must concentrate on getting through the next phase, which includes vaccinating and educating the community. He pointed out that his zip code was one of hardest hit in state.

Councilmember Luna reminded Council that part of the issue is accessibility within the communities that have higher poverty levels, misinformation, and a lack of trust. He suggested using mobile vans to provide vaccines, especially in areas where computer access is limited.

Councilmember Spilsbury stated education is an area that cannot be ignored because that affects the community's future work force.

Councilmember Thompson acknowledged education is important to the community but added there is an elected Board of Education that deals with education issues. He commented the City can partner on education issues, but the key focus should be on providing services to the community as a whole.

Further discussion ensued relative to the connection between education and workforce development in addition to creating partnerships for education.

Councilmember Freeman stated economic development hinges on education, workforce, reportability, and brings in the quality-of-life component. He noted that economic development is the engine that funds everything that Council can accomplish.

In response to a question posed by Ms. Darr regarding what economic development entails, Councilmember Freeman replied job growth and the reason people live in Mesa.

Councilmember Heredia remarked one thing that was discovered from the Mesa CARES Program is that Mesa's business community is made up of approximately 80% to 90% small businesses and the City needs to continue to concentrate focus on those small businesses.

Vice Mayor Duff commented that small businesses are the resilience of the community because a majority of the money stays within the community.

Councilmember Spilsbury indicated the new program, Building Better Business that began during the pandemic will continue supporting Mesa businesses.

Vice Mayor Duff brought up that the City must take aggressive steps in creating goals in all aspects of how business is done and lead the community in order to meet climate action goals.

Mayor Giles spoke about the issues of equality and transparency in Public Safety.

Councilmember Spilsbury commented that statistics show children living in poverty have higher rates of learning disabilities and fall behind in school which affects them the rest of their lives.

Ms. Darr shifted the conversation to Mesa moving forward and asked Council to reply to the question, "What should Mesa be known for?" Council provided responses that included:

- Great schools and higher education opportunities
- Inclusivity, diversity, and equality
- Safe neighborhoods
- Family friendly
- A community to live, work, and play
- Great location for businesses
- Superior Public Safety
- Leader in innovation

Ms. Darr followed up on the previous question with asking Council "Why?" should Mesa be known for the listed items, and the answers included the following:

- It takes a shared vision to strengthen our City
- Ensure Mesa is a strong city with great vision and leadership
- A responsive community to meet the needs of the residents
- Sustainability
- To encourage people to live in Mesa

- Maintain growth, prosperity, equity, and compassion

Ms. Darr summarized that the responses reinforce a sense of community the Mesa way to help keep the community thriving and improving. She mentioned the overarching value is the idea of keeping Mesa moving forward.

Ms. Darr presented the question, “What ideas can we champion together that will have the most citywide impact?” and requested Council to think currently, in the next five years, as well as long term.

In response to a question from Mayor Giles regarding whether the City should be working on all the goals at the same time, Mr. Brady clarified the long-term goals are broader goals that may take longer to accomplish.

Ms. Darr listed the specific ideas to champion over the next year include increasing diversity within the City, especially in upper management; promoting wider economic development opportunities and job growth; working with educational partners; expanding historic preservation; continued small business support; creating a climate action plan and equality plan; COVID-19 response; and more infrastructure.

Ms. Darr detailed the specific ideas to champion over the next five years as citywide fiber, leading regional solutions for recycling, reducing the carbon imprint, creating alternate use paths throughout the city for connectivity, Main Street development, diversity in leadership, implement a heat action plan, broadband deployment, workforce development, infrastructure, and solving the digital divide.

Ms. Darr identified long-term ideas as workforce development; infrastructure; addressing blighted areas; diversity and inclusion; 100% renewable energy by 2030, carbon neutrality by 2050; ending homelessness; education partnerships; diverse representation in City management; connectivity; and supporting historic neighborhoods.

(A brief recess occurred at 9:15 a.m. The Council Strategic Planning Session resumed at 9:31 a.m.)

Ms. Darr presented the question to Council, “Why is this idea important to the City as a whole?” and categorized the ideas brought forward by Council as the following:

- Pandemic rebound/response
- Digital divide/broadband
- Community/Quality of Life/Neighborhoods
- Job Growth and small business
- Diversity, equity, inclusion
- Climate/sustainability
- Homelessness
- Infrastructure
- Educational partnerships and workforce development

4. Discuss, review and modify (as needed) the current City Council Strategic Priorities.

4-a. Innovation is the Mesa way. We deliver innovative services and solutions for our residents, visitors, and businesses large and small through:

- i. Community safety
- ii. A skilled and talented workforce
- iii. Placemaking
- iv. Transforming neighborhoods
- v. A sustainable economy

Discussion ensued relative to the pandemic response including continuing the work that was started, building trust, increasing communication and accessibility to vaccinations, and the needs of the community.

Mr. Brady indicated the second round of funding is being discussed and the rules are still being written regarding the project eligibility. He mentioned the COM could receive approximately \$90 to \$100 million and Council needs to think in terms of long-term investments. He gave examples of helping to replace high energy use air conditioners and appliances which will help lower utility bills, homeless shelters and transitional housing, connectivity, and equipment that will help sustain agencies assisting those in need. He challenged Council to come up with ways to utilize the funding as an investment for the COM.

Additional discussion ensued regarding ways the COVID funding could be spent to invest in Mesa's future and strategies to ensure equal vaccination distribution.

Ms. Darr invited Council to examine the digital divide/broadband.

Councilmember Luna defined the digital divide as the community members who do not have access to the internet or computers and explained during the pandemic internet became a priority for small businesses and children in school.

Discussion ensued relative to building conduit that will get the fiber to needed locations and enhancing services to the community to provide affordable internet access to all community members and the need to partner with internet providers.

Mayor Giles stated the gold standard is fiber access to all and the COM will need to set an aspirational policy to require digital throughout the city.

Ms. Darr summarized the items that fall under community, quality of life, and neighborhoods and encouraged Council to share their ideas.

Councilmember Luna identified recreational amenities, as well as bicycle and walking paths are critical pieces to creating a desirable community.

Vice Mayor Duff offered that the constituents in District 4 are focused on affordable living and transportation connectivity throughout the city without the need for a car.

Councilmember Spilsbury explained District 2 is concerned about blighted areas, working with neighborhood services to clean up run-down areas, and building a sense of community.

Councilmember Thompson indicated each district has their own unique downtown. He said he is impressed with Planning & Zoning attempting to increase the quality aspect of new developments. He mentioned District 6 has the land and development is occurring; however, instead of getting high-quality restaurants with character, the same common franchises are getting in on every corner, which is a concern.

In response to a question posed by Ms. Darr asking what the Council can do as a group to put these thoughts into action, Councilmember Thompson expressed the COM must hold the developers to higher standards and not settle for mediocrity. He mentioned neighborhood safety and gave the example of a subdivision having less lighting and the neighbors not feeling safe walking at night. He said unintended consequences can occur when decisions are made.

Councilmember Spilsbury discussed neighbors working together will create a safer neighborhood. She suggested reaching out to the neighborhood leaders who are registered first and then to others that do not have leaders to help them create a neighborhood group.

Ms. Darr moved the conversation to job growth and small businesses related to economic development and encouraged Council to provide input.

Councilmember Spilsbury expanded on the Mesa Business Builder Program, adding she would like to see a small business registry created to be able to reach out and support the businesses in Mesa by sharing resources.

Mr. Brady pointed out that a business registry was discussed by the Audit and Finance Committee before the pandemic and will be brought back for discussion.

In response to Councilmember Freeman inquiring about the ease of the permitting process for businesses, Mr. Brady indicated the City had converted to a new system to allow remote applications right before the pandemic and was able to quickly pivot. He mentioned the biggest challenge right now is the volume of applications coming in for the large industrial buildings and bigger projects.

Further discussion ensued among Council regarding economic development, the partnership with CO+HOOTS to create the HUUB for webinars and resources to help small businesses, as well as expansion of other programs that have been developed to assist the community.

Councilmember Thompson remarked the City has opportunities to zone for industrial to bring jobs and continues to vote for residential developments. He commented that others do not have the same vision as he does for District 6.

Vice Mayor Duff encouraged infield development and adaptive reuse to fill in the open land and reinvesting in older buildings.

In response to a question posed by Ms. Darr regarding ideas to champion diversity, equity, and inclusion, Councilmember Luna touched on the fact that the COM does not have diversity in upper management that reflects the community.

Discussion ensued relative to the challenges and ways to support programs that reinforce Mesa's commitment to diversity and inclusion, as well as outreach that will educate the community relative to diversity opportunities for the City.

Councilmember Heredia advised outreach must be more intentional, so the community is aware of what is available, keeping in mind that many small businesses have language barriers.

Mayor Giles stated the point of the strategic meeting is for Council to emphasize the priorities for the City. He voiced his pleasure with the COM Office of Diversity and his interactions with Diversity and Community Engagement Administrator Andrea Alicoate. He reminded everyone that diversity is one of Mesa's core values as an organization.

Councilmember Spilsbury mentioned her desire to spread #MesaKindness to create a culture of kindness within the City and encouraged using the hashtag every time an act of kindness is witnessed.

Ms. Darr summarized the actionable items under climate and sustainability include the heat action plan, climate action plan, carbon neutrality, and asked Council to expand on their thoughts.

Mayor Giles explained the COM is committed to creating a climate action plan and renewing recycling and that staff are in the process of bringing the plan together to present to Council at a future meeting.

Additional discussion ensued relative to leading the region and the community in good practices, balancing the growth, the City's impact on the earth, and learning from other communities.

Ms. Darr transitioned the conversation to homelessness and asked Council to exchange their ideas.

Discussion took place between Council regarding ways to deal with homelessness, including the programs that were created using CARES funding, the homeless strategic plan that staff continues to work on to help transition homeless individuals into permanent housing, and ways to invest in partnerships to come up with innovative ideas to ensure Mesa is part of the regional plan.

Assistant City Manager John Pombier spoke on the Public Safety side of dealing with homelessness and mental health. He commented on the mental health partnerships that are being formed to help take the burden off the officers and having mental health experts assist in calls to de-escalate situations.

In response to a question posed by Councilmember Heredia, Mr. Pombier advised currently incoming calls can be sent to Police or Fire, and the goal is to develop a third option of being able to send the caller to a mental health operator who will triage the call and assess the best person to respond. He feels this will void sending the wrong resources to calls. He mentioned the City is committed to growing the process if it is proven to be effective.

Councilmember Freeman indicated having an analysis of the call volume statistics would be helpful.

Further discussion ensued regarding the number of mental health calls received, the difficulty in answering those calls, and methods that will assist officers.

Ms. Darr transitioned the conversation to infrastructure and requested Council share their thoughts on what is needed in the COM.

Councilmember Thompson indicated the newer districts do not have the amount of infrastructure that the older districts have such as roadways, water, and sewer, which energizes economic development within the city. He explained businesses look for that infrastructure to support their needs and there should be a plan to invest in additional infrastructure to attract larger businesses.

Mr. Brady stated the challenge, especially in the high growth areas, is when a developer comes in and purchases land further away from the end of the line, the cost to connect to the utilities is high and then wants the City to front the costs. He explained that most cities no longer have bond elections because of the difficulty in coming up with a four-year estimate. He said the COM needs to have a long-term plan with flexibility for adjustments.

Vice Mayor Duff commented on infill development in Mesa to grow economically without growing utility debt.

In response to a question from Councilmember Spilsbury in regard to the vision for growth in the COM, Mr. Brady pointed out years ago a decision was made that the boundaries of Mesa are as far as the city will expand and there is a plan to build out the entire area.

Ms. Darr summarized the discussion on educational partnerships and workforce development. She outlined that the City is focused on creating partnerships regarding education of children all the way through college.

Mr. Brady emphasized the importance of assistance for children through each grade to get them to some kind of professional or college attainment to become part of the labor force. He suggested thinking in terms of the attainment component, recognizing there are many pieces that lead up to that.

Additional discussion ensued relative to programs such as the Mesa Promise Program, Move One Mesa, and Mesa Counts on College which are assistance programs to fill the gaps on the way to achieving certificates or a college degree.

5. Closing remarks and discussion on the next steps relating to the City Council Strategic Priorities.

Ms. Darr stated the next step will be staff bringing the strategic priority ideas forward at a future study session.

Mr. Brady thanked Council for sharing their ideas. He commented on the importance of hearing different ideas and having a dialogue about what each councilmember thinks is important.

Discussion ensued relative to Council thoughts on coming back in-person for meetings, what can be done to achieve the discussed strategic priorities, as well as finding solutions that touch multiple areas.

Mayor Giles thanked Ms. Darr for facilitating the meeting.

6. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Council Strategic Planning Session adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

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JOHN GILES, MAYOR

ATTEST:

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DEE ANN MICKELSEN, CITY CLERK

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Council Strategic Planning Session of the City Council of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of March 2021. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

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DEE ANN MICKELSEN, CITY CLERK

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(Attachment – 1)

# Mayor and Council Strategic Planning Retreat

March 4, 2021

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# mesa·az

# Mesa Moving Forward: What, Why, and How?

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# Strategic Priorities

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**Innovation is the Mesa Way.** We deliver innovative services and solutions for our residents, visitors, and businesses large and small, through:

Community Safety

Skilled and Talented Workforce

Placemaking

Transforming Neighborhoods

Sustainable Economy

# 2020 Hindsight

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WHAT WAS A VALUABLE  
LESSON YOU LEARNED  
IN 2020?



WHAT WERE YOU MOST  
PROUD OF MESA FOR IN  
2020?

# What is Mesa known for?

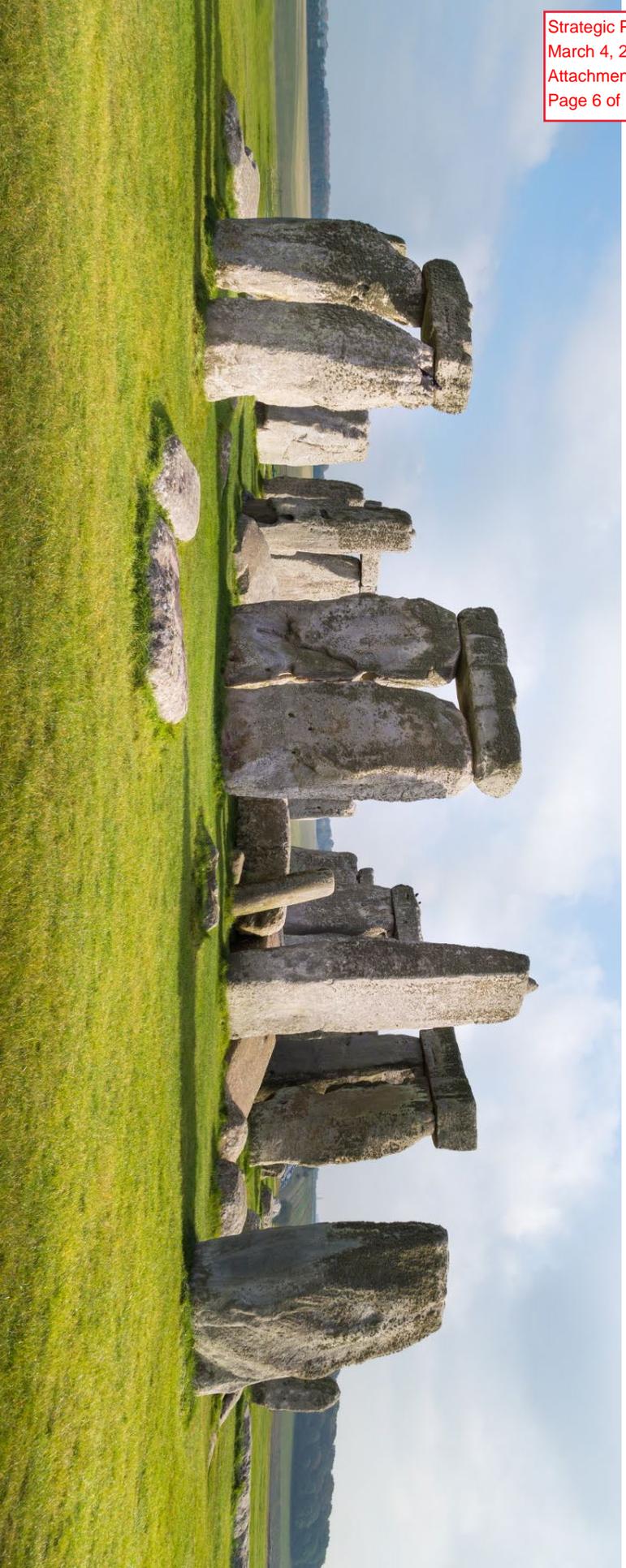
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What are our  
strengths?

What are our  
weaknesses?



mesa·az



Moving forward: What should Mesa be known for? Why?



What ideas can we champion together that will have the most city-wide impact?

# List specific ideas to champion:



This year (FY  
2021/2022)



The next 5 years



Long-term



Break

**WHY** is this idea important to the City as a whole?

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What is the community **value** addressed by the success of this idea?

# Strategic Priorities

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**Innovation is the Mesa Way.** We deliver innovative services and solutions for our residents, visitors, and businesses large and small, through:

Community Safety

Skilled and Talented Workforce

Placemaking

Transforming Neighborhoods

Sustainable Economy

**Innovation is the Mesa Way. We deliver innovative services and solutions for our residents, visitors, and businesses large and small, through:**

# Community Safety

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Building communities that are safe, healthy and welcoming.

# Skilled and Talented Workforce

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Leveraging partnerships to create an enriching environment where the job skills required to succeed in today's economy are made readily available and easily accessible.

# Placemaking

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Cultivating vibrant and unique spaces, ranging from a city block to entire economic centers that attract and benefit residents, business and visitors.

# Transforming Neighborhoods

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Mesa's neighborhoods are clean, safe, diverse, and economically vibrant places where residents and businesses are engaged, informed, and take pride in their properties and community.

# Sustainable Economy

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Striving for continued economic growth and increased prosperity for all Mesa residents.