

MECKLENBURG COUNTY GOVERNMENT

IBM SMARTER CITIES UPDATE

Operating under a grant from IBM to Mecklenburg County, a team of five IBM executives worked full-time between November 1- 19, 2010 to analyze the issue of integrating capital master planning in Mecklenburg County and recommend a course of action that addressed the disconnected manner in which capital infrastructure investment decisions were made.

Mecklenburg County asked IBM to recommend an approach for conducting Joint Master Capital Planning across all Mecklenburg County departments and the entities that collectively constitute local government within the political boundaries of the County.

At the Mecklenburg County Board of County Commissioner's February 1, 2011 meeting, IBM presented its final report to the Board with the title "Think as One, Act as One." The IBM team concluded that all local government entities, not just Mecklenburg County, should be at the table when decisions about capital projects are made. IBM's recommendations emphasized that the decisions about which capital infrastructure projects to fund should be made collectively rather than within each project category silo, using quantifiable data to prioritize projects based on achieving the best result for the community at the neighborhood level.

The first step recommended by the IBM Team was establishing formal support for joint capital master planning among various stakeholders, largely the towns within the County. From February through August, the Mecklenburg County Manager's Office staff has spent considerable time meeting with local officials and staff from all local government entities within the County to share the IBM recommendations, while building consensus and support for the concept of comprehensive capital planning.

This process recently concluded with the successful completion of the first step recommended by the IBM Team -- approval of resolutions of support from Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte and the Towns of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville. This accomplishment is significant as it establishes formal, unanimous support for consolidated capital planning and indicates the commitment by the local officials to begin the process of considering other IBM Team recommendations. In short, there is full buy-in from all the

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jurisdictions in Mecklenburg County and a pledge to work collaboratively in developing a joint master planning process.

Another recommendation being implemented as a result of the Smarter Cities Challenge is the expansion of the Charlotte Neighborhood Quality of Life Study. The City of Charlotte uses a multi-variant index, including property values, among others (crime rates, teen-age pregnancy, access to transportation, etc.), to assess neighborhood quality of life. Since the proposed capital assets planning process targets neighborhoods as the unit of analysis, County Manager's Office staff is finalizing plans to develop a base model that would expand the NQOL study to include an overlay of all towns within Mecklenburg County. The NQOL Index can be used as a possible benchmark for focused neighborhood planning and investment. The IBM Team cited the Quality of Life data as an example in its recommendation for adopting a methodology for quantifiable priority setting in funding capital infrastructure investments.

This expansion of the Quality of Life Study also presents an opportunity for data sharing across the County with all local government entities, allowing jurisdictions to observe and identify neighborhood-level drivers, trends and other factors that are indicators of neighborhood economic health. The City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County and other community partners also envision using the Quality of Life Study data to pilot enhanced collaboration in providing operational services at the neighborhood level. As a result, these concepts contained in the IBM recommendations that are focused on capital infrastructure are also being considered for improving the efficacy of direct services aimed at improving the economic well-being of neighborhoods in the City of Charlotte and across Mecklenburg County.

While seeking support for Joint Capital Master Planning among all local government jurisdictions, Mecklenburg County also changed its internal methodology for prioritizing capital infrastructure funding. In January, 2011, the Board of County Commissioners adopted a criteria for prioritizing capital project funding across all departments and agencies that receive capital project funding from Mecklenburg County. This includes not only departments and agencies operated by and under the authority of the Board of County Commissioners, but also those outside this direct authority, such as the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Central Piedmont Community

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College and the Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library. In July, 2011 the criteria was applied to a list of 65 capital projects for which bond funding had been approved but not yet issued. For the first time, school projects were ranked along with park and recreation projects, community college projects and more. Previously, these projects were only ranked by priority within each category (e.g., schools projects ranked with other schools projects; park and recreation projects ranked only with other park and recreation projects, etc.).

The IBM Team's recommendations also are being implemented within the context of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners' strategic goals. These strategic goals are articulated using a balanced scorecard that is based on the Board's long-term vision for the community. One of the Board's focus areas on its balanced scorecard is "Sustainable Community." Strategic goals in this focus area address Environmental, Economic, and Social factors affecting the county and its residents. As part of preparing to update the Board's long-term vision (Vision 2020), the County's staff leadership team for the Sustainable Community Focus Area developed additional recommended goals that have incorporated Quality of Life Study components that would be measured at the neighborhood level. Again, the genesis of these proposed changes are linked to the IBM Team recommendations. They also reflect the County's efforts to be accountable for measuring performance and success of services that affect neighborhoods.

In these ways and others yet to come, the IBM Smarter Cities Challenge recommendations are becoming part of the fabric of change and innovation in Mecklenburg County.