



# City of Walker

*Creating the Future*  
*February, 2008*



# City of Walker

## *Creating the Future*

### **Executive Summary**

The City Commission and Department Heads of Walker met on February 2, 2008 to review the vision for the City and to develop a strategic plan identifying key priorities for the City for the next three to five years.

The group identified 20 key strategies for achieving the vision. After a rigorous prioritization process, five strategies were selected as critical areas for focus in the next three to five years.

- *Consistent Revenue Source*
- *Strong Communication Between City Departments and the City Commission*
- *Up-to-Date Technology*
- *Prioritized Effectively and Held Accountable for Implementation*
- *Enforcement of Ordinances*

Participants also identified 13 strategies that are important to continue to perform well. As foundational strategies, these are critical to maintain.

- *Maintain Essential City Services*
- *Maintain Quality Staff*
- *Capital Improvement Planning*
- *Community Based Planning-Master Plan*
- *Attract Quality Businesses*
- *Fiscally Conservative*
- *City Takes the Initiative with Citizens*
- *Target Areas for Development*
- *Formal Collaborative Agreements with Other Agencies, Cities*
- *Escrow Accounts so that Development Pays for Development*
- *Combined Purchasing and Equipment (across departments and other governmental units)*
- *Partnerships with Businesses*
- *RFP/RFQ for Standalone Improvements (Partner with DDA to find development proposals)*

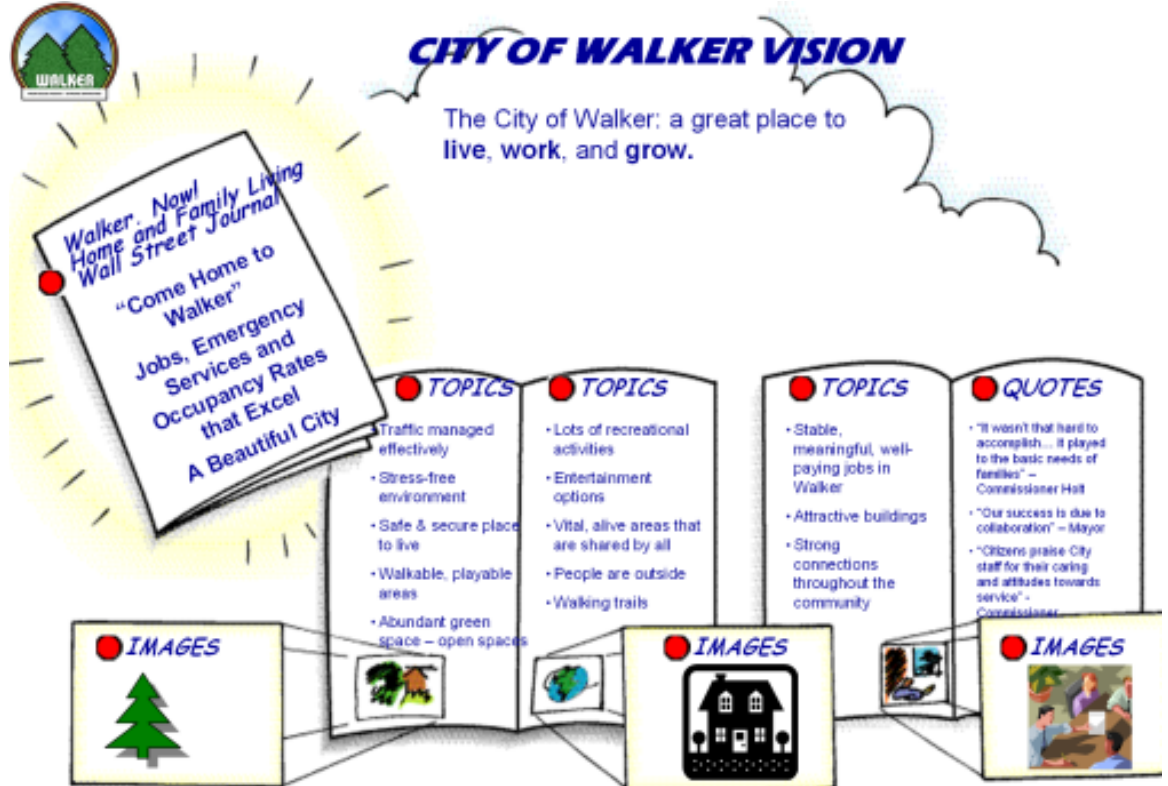
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## Vision

Understanding where an organization is going is a critical part of successful change. Commission members participated in a visioning exercise, which resulted in six major themes that are important for the City in the future. These themes can be summarized in a single phrase: A great place to **live, work, and grow**.

- *Come home to Walker*
- *Stable, well-paying jobs*
- *Attractive buildings*
- *Great emergency services*
- *High occupancy rates*
- *A beautiful city*





## Values

Understanding an organization's values is important – because these represent the “non-negotiable” behaviors that will govern its activities and employees. In prior work sessions, the City has defined the following values.

Representatives of the City of Walker are dedicated to:

- *Public health, safety, and security*
- *Open communication*
- *Fiscal responsibility*
- *Efficiency and productivity*
- *Active listening*
- *Dedication and honesty*
- *Respect for diversity*
- *Quality performance*

every day.

## Creating the Future

### Obstacles

What are the things, real or perceived, that can get in the way of achieving vision for the City of Walker? Participants identified the following obstacles.

- Resistance to Change
- Educating the public/public trust
- Brain drain
- Funding
- Pressures on elected officials and staff
- Failure to look regionally
- Environmental issues in South Walker
- Maintaining an aging system/infrastructure
- Courage to make decisions without fear of risks
- Outdated technology
- NIMBY
- Bad economy – bad energy
- Changing work force
- Competition for outside monies/grants
- Turf wars – dept/dept, city/city, township/township, etc.
- Communication issues with public and staff
- Debt load
- Special interests
- Buy-in – building commitment

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- Changing Michigan model (change in old way of doing things from an automotive standpoint – new manufacturing age)
  - Continuing to evaluate decisions and make changes as necessary

A discussion of the Obstacles allowed for clearing the air and served as a springboard for looking forward.

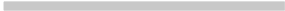
### **Enablers**

What are the things we have going for us now that can help us create the City that we want? Commission members focused on the question, “It’s five years from now. You have had great success.”

- What “enablers” were available that helped the City to achieve its great success?
- What resources did you take advantage of?

The group identified the following enablers, rating their importance as well (listed from most important to least important).

- Grants, donations, public funds
- Master plan for downtown Standale and GVS students
- Long-term capital plan
- Strength of local colleges and universities
- Tax structure (income tax driven)
- Utilizing connections – staff, business, legislators
- Combining multiple funding sources
- Educated staff and consultants
- Technology
- Community, commission, staff unity
- Shared services
- Geographic location/multiple highways
- Asset pooling and reorganization of assets
- Networking
- Quality of staff and departments
- Learning from successes of other cities and township
- Those citizens who don’t show up (silent majority)
- Small community focus groups
- City bond rating/economic strength
- Rolling with the punches (changes that are mandatory, etc.)
- Relatively young infrastructure
- City newsletter, local media
- Public communication (town hall meetings, national night out, etc.)
- Open space
- Fitness center as a community center
- Commitment to quality development



## Strategic Profile

Having considered the obstacles to success and possible resources that could be employed to achieve the vision for the City, Commission then considered possible strategies that could be implemented to achieve success.

After considering many possible strategies, participants identified 20 strategies for success.

- A. Up to date technology
- B. Enforcement of Ordinances
- C. Strong communication between city departments/commission (team work, creativity)
- D. City initiative with citizens (newsletters, forums, town meetings, etc.)
- E. Community based planning/master plan
- F. Escrow accts so development pays for development
- G. Partnerships with businesses
- H. Grant resource center (effective use of grants/centralized)
- I. Prioritized effectively ... held accountable for implementation
- J. Educated public on local government's role (can do, can't do)
- K. Attract quality businesses
- L. Combined purchasing and equipment (across departments/other governmental units)
- M. Target areas for development (Standale, Orchard Park, etc.)
- N. RFP/RFQ for Standale Improvements
- O. Maintained quality staff
- P. Formal collaborative agreements with other agencies, cities, etc. (police, fire, DPW)
- Q. Capital improvement planning
- R. Fiscally conservative
- S. Maintain essential city services
- T. Consistent revenue source

## Strategic Rankings

The 20 strategies were ranked and plotted using Consensys™ technology. They were viewed from two perspectives.

1. Importance – Looking back from great success, having implemented all of these strategies, which were the most important in achieving the City's vision?

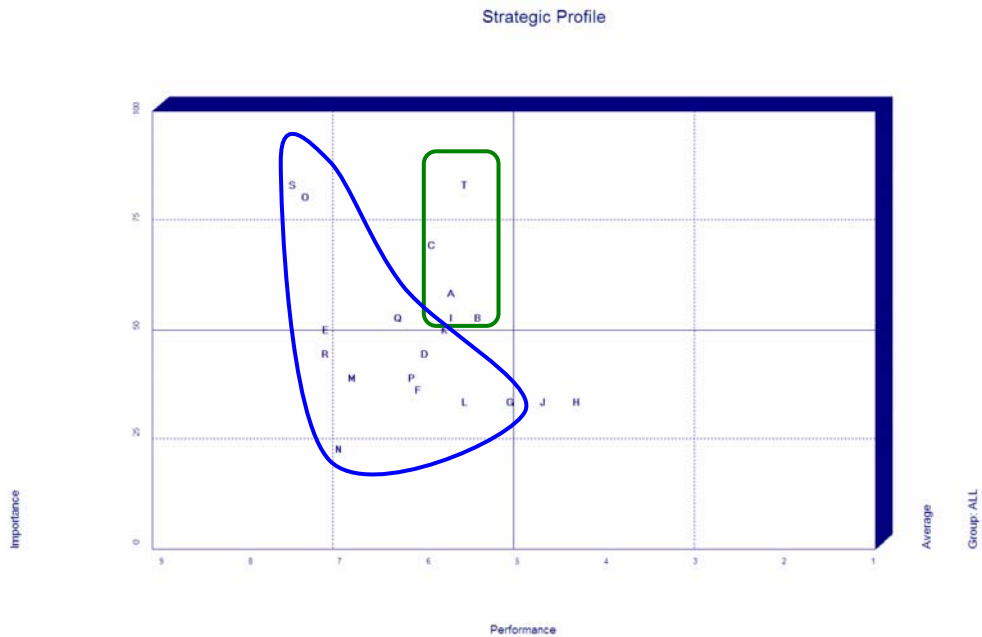
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2. Satisfaction with Current Performance – How satisfied are you with this strategy being performed today as compared to where it needs to be?

The following chart is an opportunity profile displaying the results of the group’s evaluation. Letters on the chart correspond with the letters shown in the list of strategies.

**Profile Interpretation**

The items with the green rectangle around them are the most important strategies to be addressed first.



**High-Leverage Opportunities**

Five strategies emerged as high-leverage opportunities (high importance, low performance). They are:

- *Consistent Revenue Source*
- *Strong Communication Between City Departments and the City Commission*
- *Up-to-Date Technology*
- *Prioritized Effectively and Held Accountable for Implementation*
- *Enforcement of Ordinances*

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### Foundational Strategies

13 additional strategies (in blue) were identified as foundational strategies that should be continued. These are strategies that are important to continue, as they are foundational to the success of the City.

- *Maintain Essential City Services*
- *Maintained Quality Staff*
- *Capital Improvement Planning*
- *Community Based Planning-Master Plan*
- *Attract Quality Businesses*
- *Fiscally Conservative*
- *City Takes the Initiative with Citizens*
- *Target Areas for Development*
- *Formal Collaborative Agreements with Other Agencies, Cities*
- *Escrow Accounts so that Development Pays for Development*
- *Combined Purchasing and Equipment (across departments and other governmental units)*
- *Partnerships with Businesses*
- *RFP/RFQ for Standalone Improvements*

### Mid-Term Opportunities (18-24 months)

Two additional strategies (in red) were identified as mid-term opportunities that should be explored. While these will take slightly longer to implement, research should be started soon. As performance improves on the high-leverage opportunities, these strategies are likely to increase in importance. In addition, it may be appropriate to consider alternative ways to approach these issues.

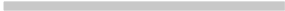
- *Educated the Public on Government's Role*
- *Effective Use of Grants (Grant Resource Center)*

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## Consensus

While it is important to look at the overall voting results, it is equally important to consider the level of agreement for each strategy. Appendix 1 includes a complete set of “diversity” profiles, showing levels of agreement among session participants. In most cases, there is significant agreement among the groups.

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## Conclusion and Recommendations

There is much work to be done to create action plans for each of these key strategies. Participants created an action plan for each of the five high-importance strategies.

### Consistent Revenue Source

A subgroup defined this strategy as developing a stable, predictable, and consistent source of funding. There are currently several sources of funding for the City.

- Property tax
- Income tax
- Fines, fees, and permits
- Revenue sharing/Act 51
- Grants
- Borrowed funds
- Dedicated millage
- Special assessments for infrastructure (e.g., lighting, sewer, water, roads)

Key responsibility for this strategy lies with the Commission, Department Heads, and Management for the City. Department heads are responsible for identifying and applying for grants. The City Commission and City Manager are primarily responsible for property and income tax policy. Revenue sharing and Act 51 responsibility is shared between the City Commission, City Manager, and State Legislators. Fines, fees and permits are the responsibility of the building department, clerk, recreation department, Walker Ice and Fitness Center, the Court, and the police.

Steps that need to be taken include:

- Discussion with City Manager and City Commission regarding revenue adjustments.
- Department heads must meet to discuss areas for revenue increases.
- This work must be completed for the current budget cycle.

**Cathy VanderMeulen** will take the lead on this strategy.

### Strong Communication Between the City Commission and Department Heads

A subgroup began by defining key terms in this strategy. They propose that an action plan for this strategy must include developing methods for sincere, legitimate, purposeful and effective communication between the City Commission and City department heads. It should include all aspects of communication, including both passive and active communication. The group felt that strong communication includes recognition of expertise and authority and that it is essential to the democratic process.

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While there are many who share responsibility for developing a strong communication method, **Dan and Barb** agreed to take the lead on creating a regular system for communication and interaction between the staff and the City Commission.

### **Up-to-Date Technology**

There are several factors to take into account for updating City technology. The first, which is already in process, is the conversion of the servers to a Windows-based framework. Once that has been completed, several departments have needs for updated software, including the following.

- New income tax software
- New finance software
- Radio issues
- Capital to Operating
- Oblique imaging
- Website – interactive (for payments, etc.)
- CAD & RMS

The speed with which these programs can be implemented is highly dependent upon the budgeting process. **Julie** will lead this effort, with support from CPR and Mike Lennon. The first step is to identify the cost of various systems (already underway) and to prioritize the order in which they should be implemented. During this next budget cycle, these questions need to be addressed.

### **Prioritize Effectively/Hold Accountable for Implementation**

This strategy is primarily about creating metrics for measuring success along with regular processes to ensure that the strategic plan is on track. Department heads, the City Commission, and Managers are responsible for ensuring prioritization and implementation. Staff and supervisors also have a role to play. **Cathy and Scott** agreed to take the lead on developing processes for ensuring that people are on track.

### **Enforcement of Ordinances**

This strategy involves ensuring that the City takes a proactive approach to ordinance enforcement. The Zoning Department (**Jeff**) has primary responsibility, but needs help from the planning department, planning commission, Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), Fire Department, and Police Department. One important step is training for the ZBA members, which is included in the 2008-09 budget.

City Commission has recently taken the first step on this strategy by changing the enforcement policy from one of “responding to complaints” to “proactively seeking out and identifying enforcement issues.” As a result, the Zoning Department is changing the steps taken and methods of prioritization for code violations. Key measures of effectiveness will include the number of contacts and the number of issues resolved.

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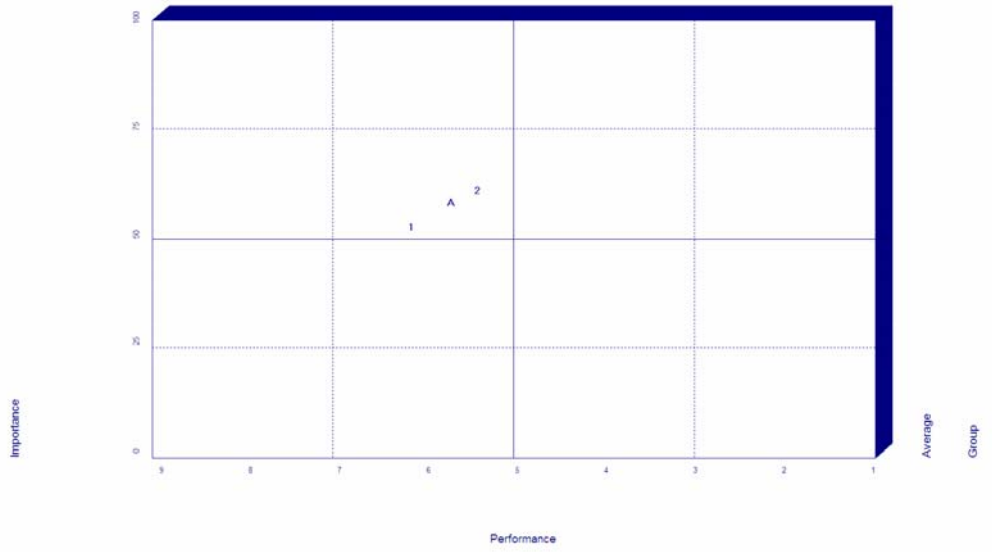


## Appendix 1: Diversity Profiles

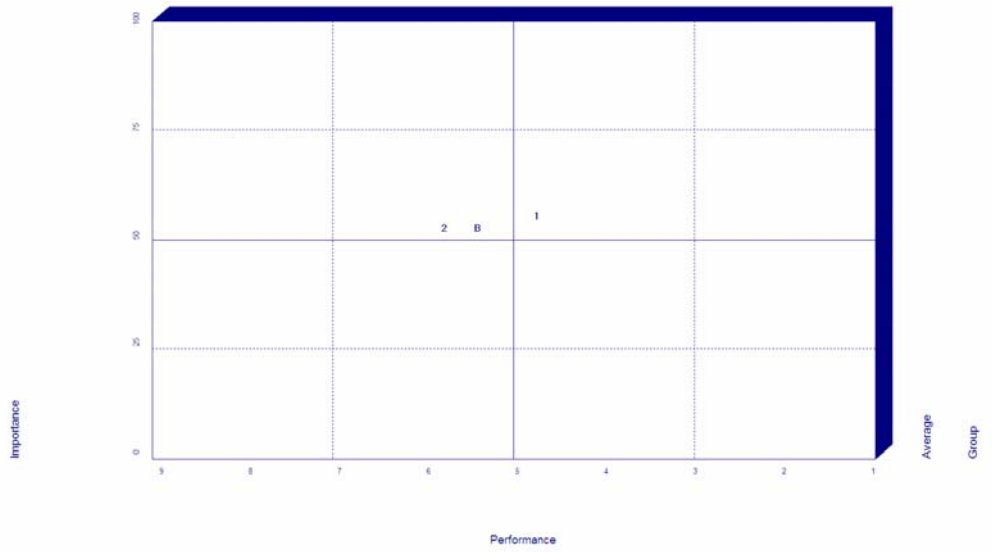
The profiles in this section show the difference between the levels of agreement on each strategy between the Commission and the Staff. Note that when all of the votes are in the same quadrant, there is a high level of consensus. There are no areas of major disagreement between the two groups.



### A- Up to date technology

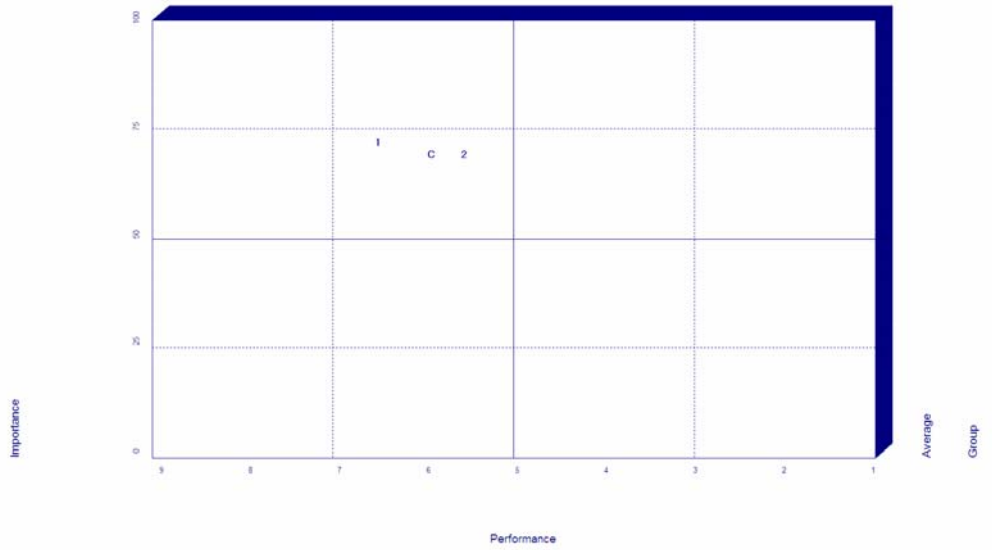


### B- Enforcement of Ordinances

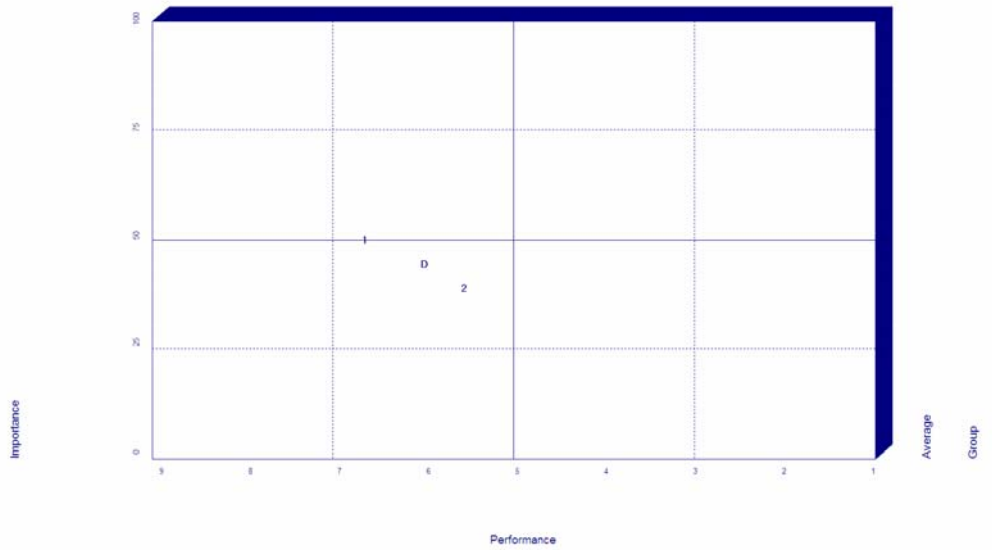




C- Strong communication between city departments/commission (team work, creativity)

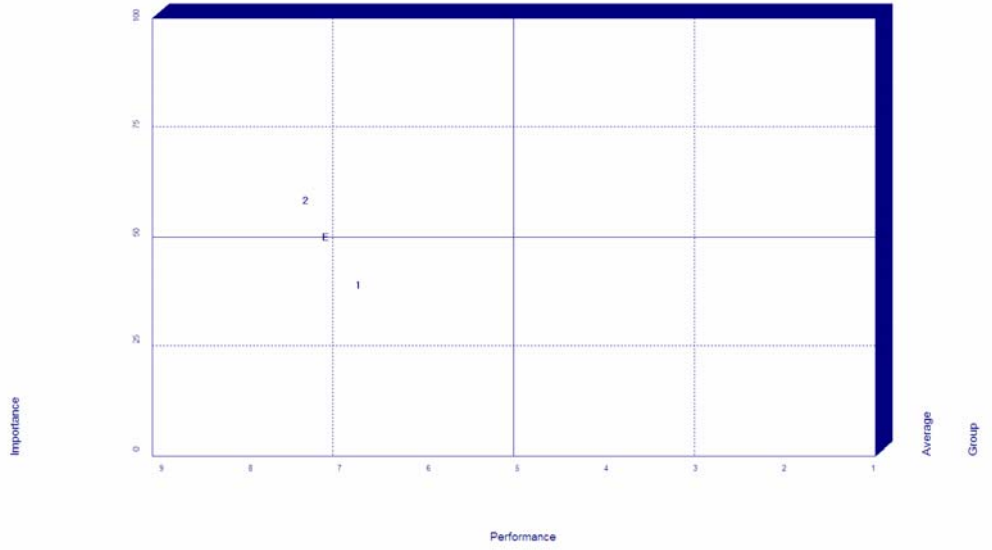


D- City initiative with citizens (newsletters, forums, town meetings, etc.)

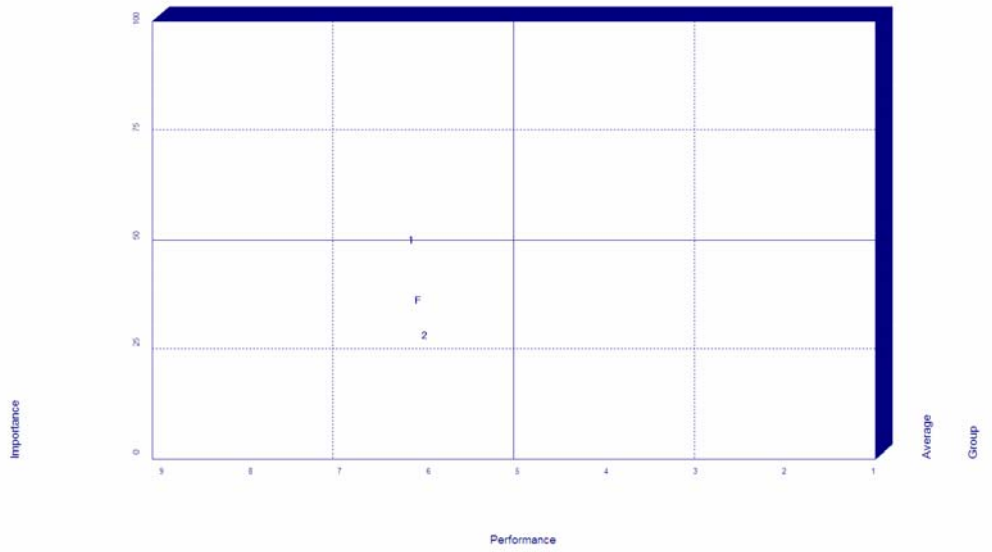


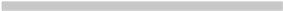


E- Community based planning/master plan

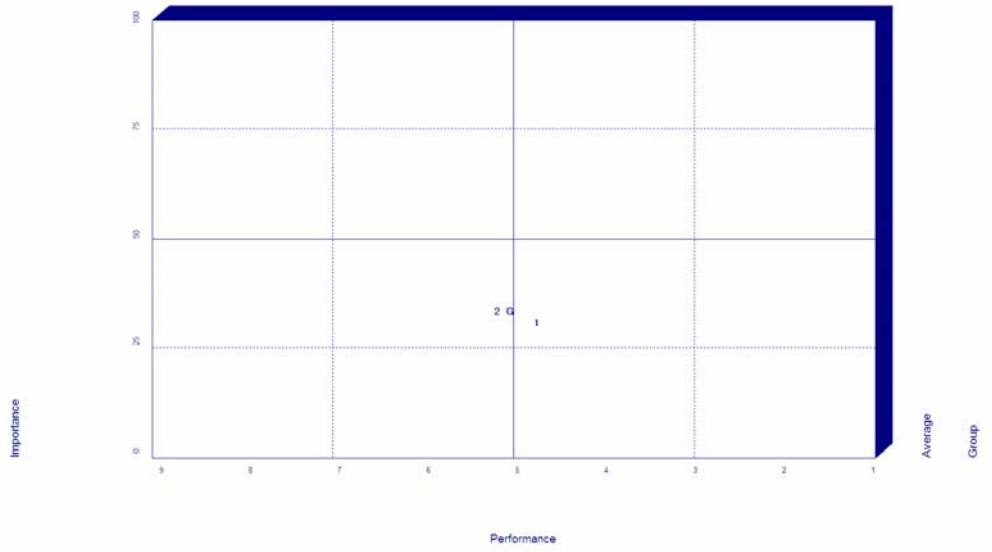


F- Escrow accts so development pays for development

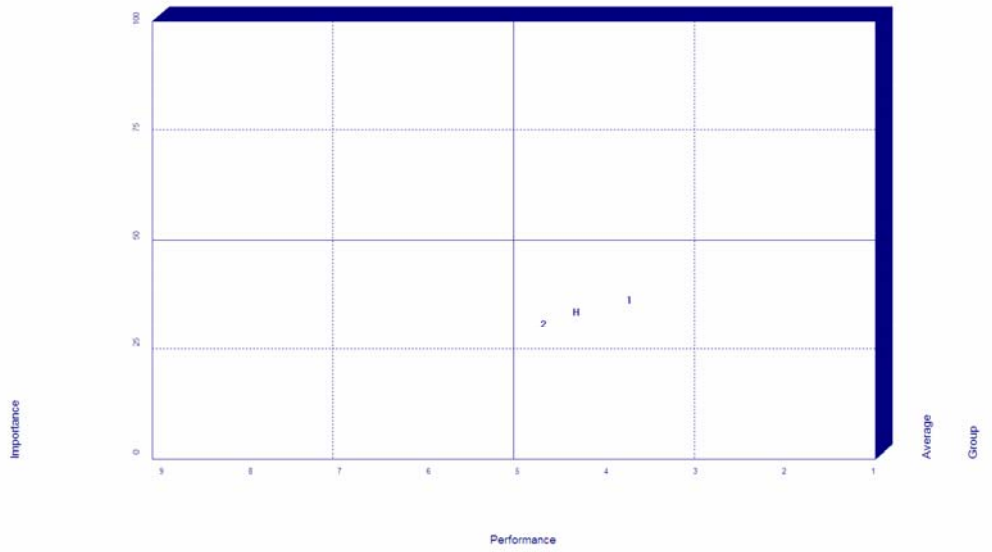


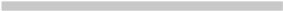


### G- Partnerships with businesses

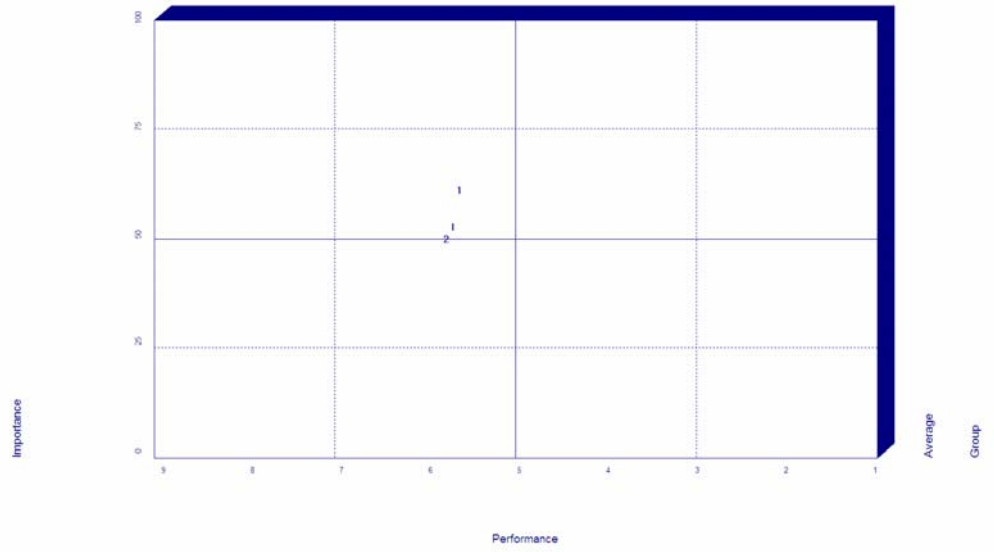


### H- Grant resource center (effective use of grants/centralized)

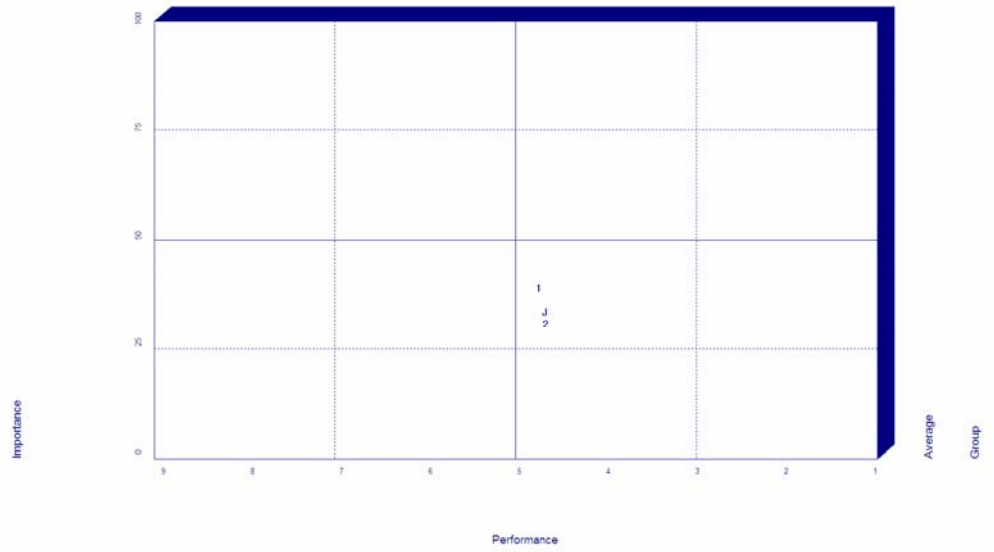




I- Prioritized effectively ... held accountable for implementation

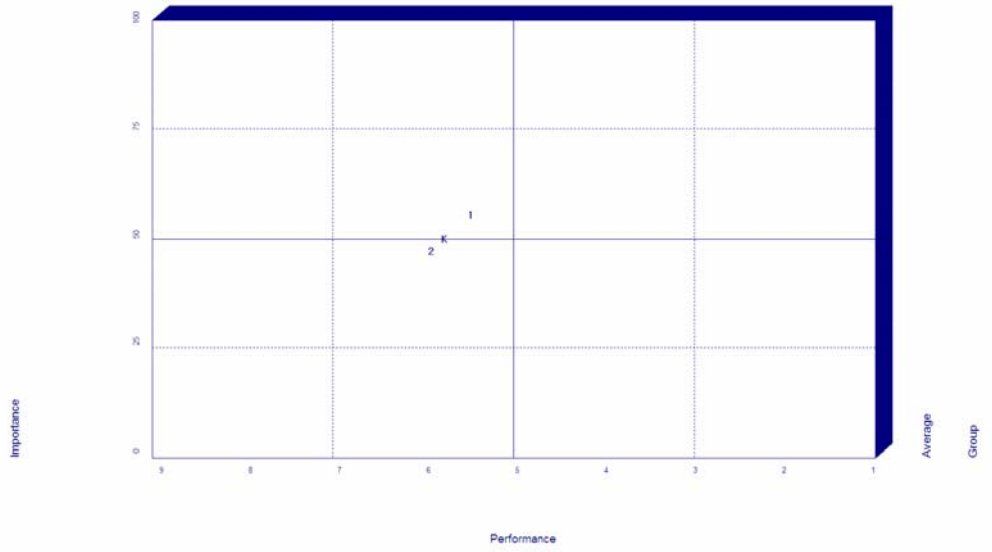


J- Educated public on local government's role (can do, can't do)

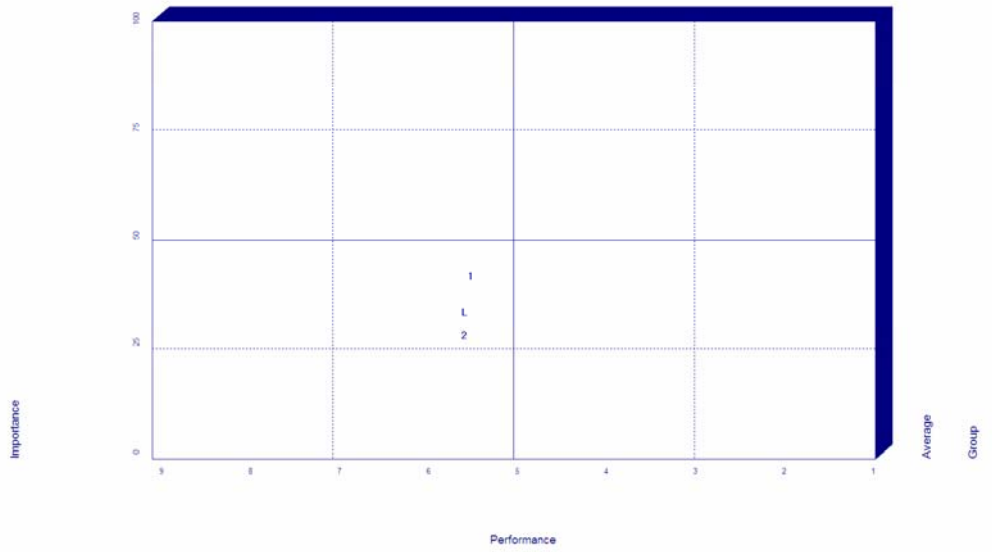


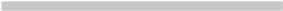


K- Attract quality businesses

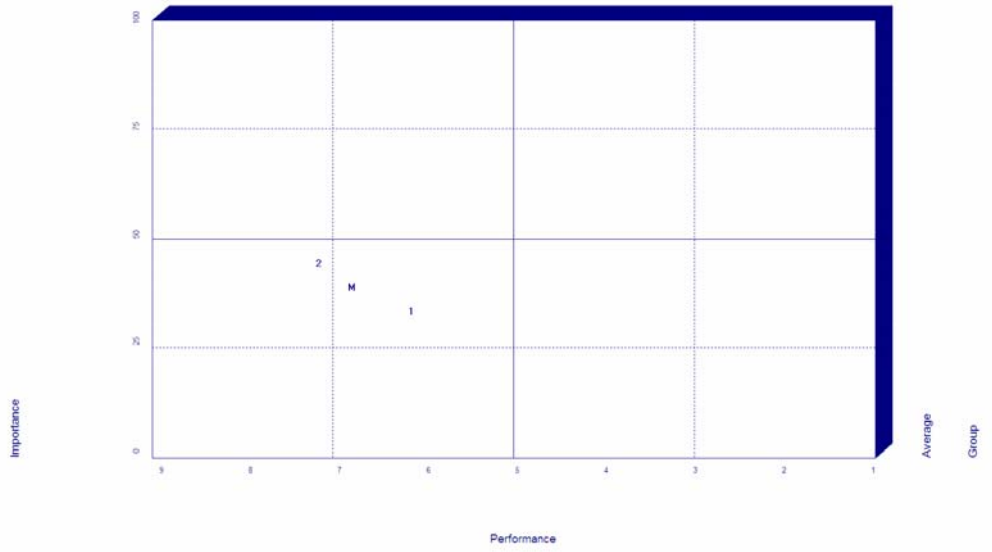


L- Combined purchasing and equipment (across departments/other governmental units)

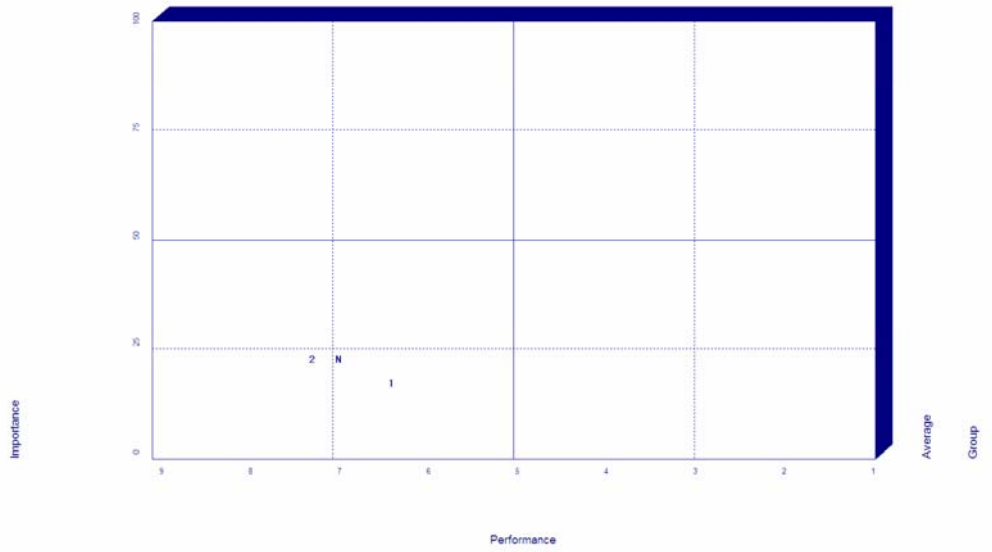


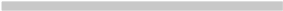


M- Target areas for development (Standale, Orchard Park, etc.)

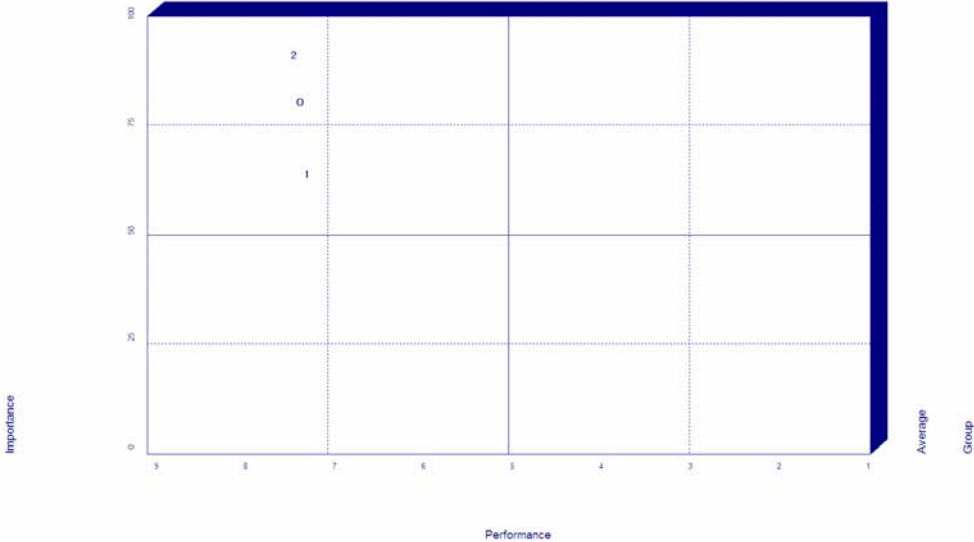


N- RFP/RFQ for Standale Improvements

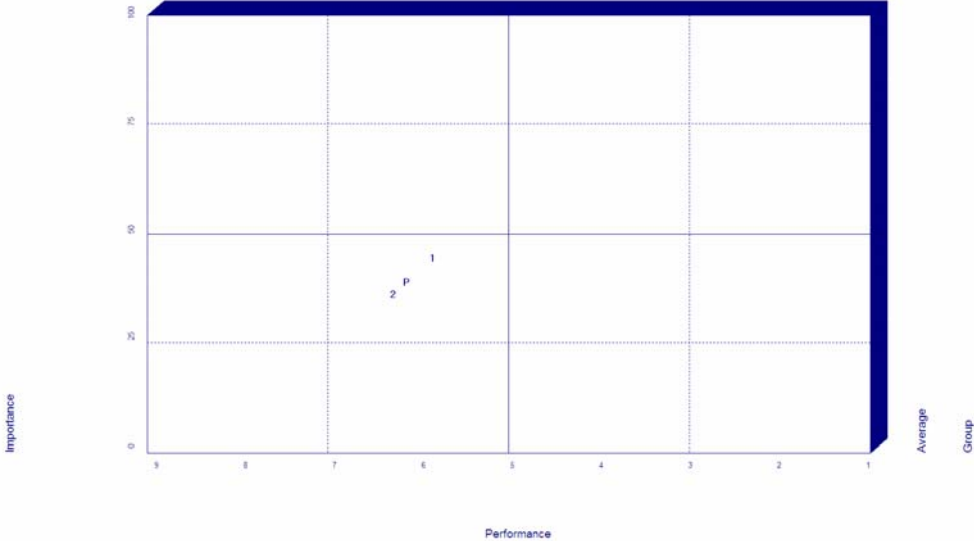


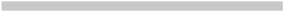


O- Maintained quality staff

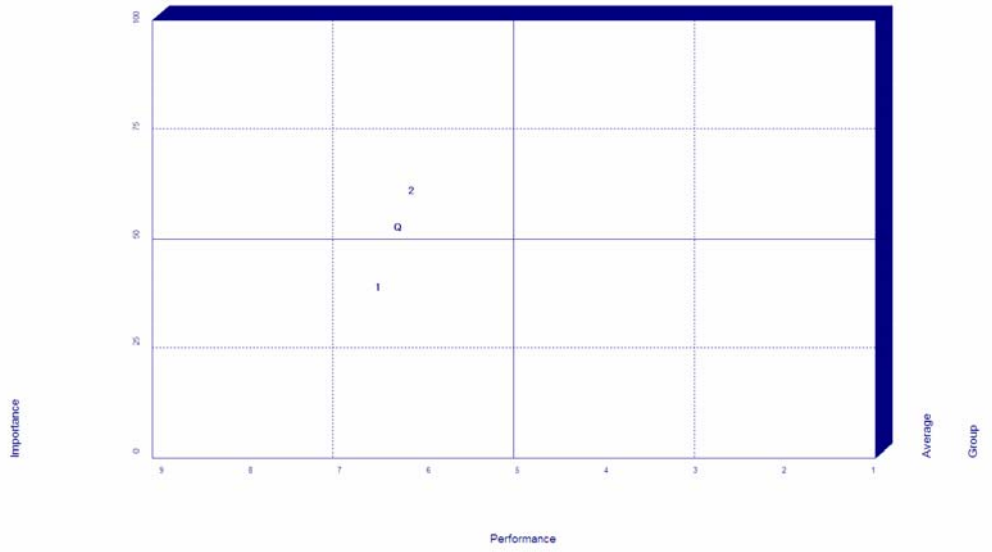


P- Formal collaborative agreements with other agencies, cities, etc. (police, fire, DPW)

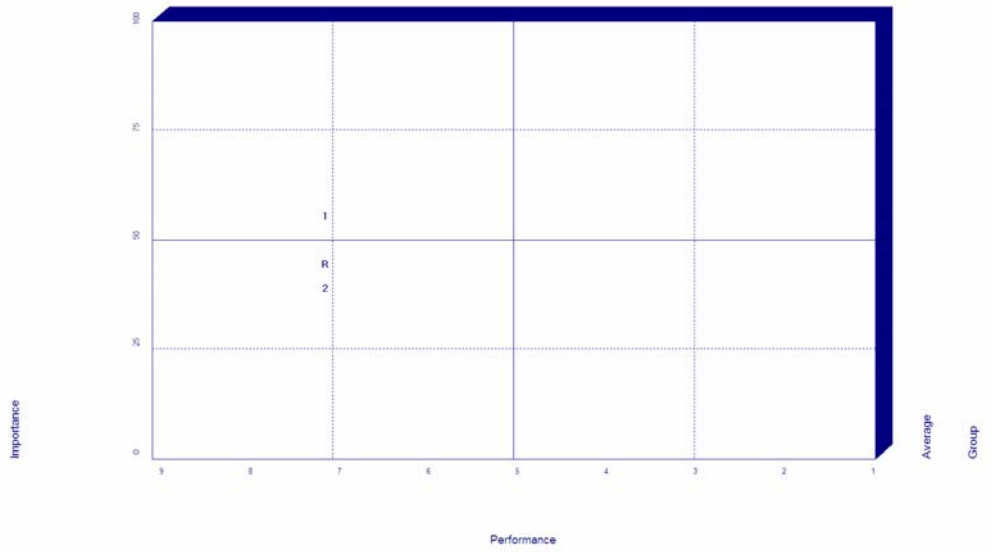




### Q- Capital improvement planning

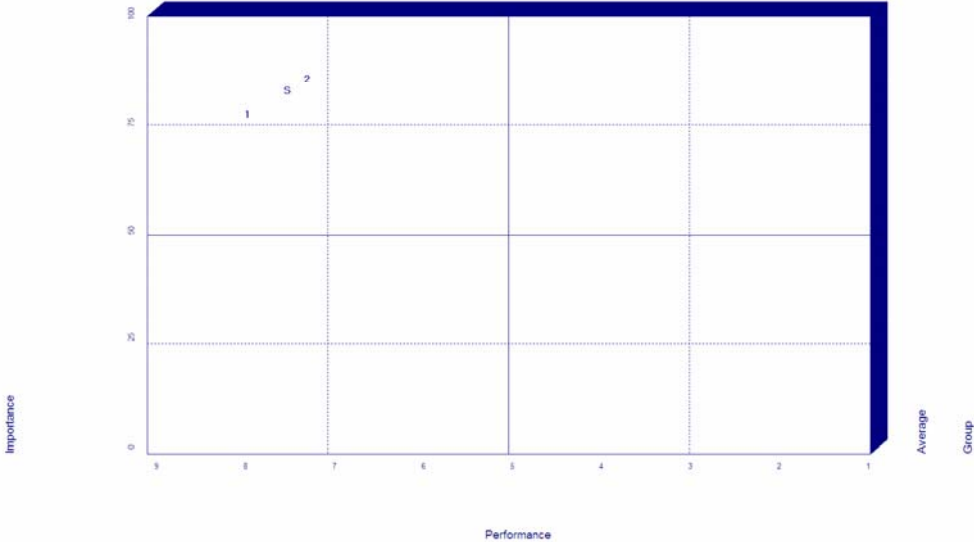


### R- Fiscally conservative





S- Maintain essential city services



T- Consistent revenue source

