

City of Alameda
City Council Interview Report
January 2025

The summary below is based on interviews that were conducted in January 2025 with the Mayor, Vice-Mayor and Council members: Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft, Michele Pryor, Tony Daysog, Tracy Jensen, and Greg Boller. Interviewer and scribe: Shawn Spano.

The summary is organized into three sections based on the questions that were asked in the interviews: (1) Learning about individual Council members, (2) Norms for Council-to-Council relations, and (3) Norms for Council-to-staff communication. Key points that emerged in response to the questions that were asked are included in the form of summary statements and paraphrases.

Learning about individual Council Members

1. *What inspired you to become involved in public service? What events shaped your decision to run for City Council?*
 - All of you said that you became involved in public service through participation in community groups, civic organizations, and City commissions and boards. All of you were engaged in the community in one way or another before you ran for Council.
 - Some of you first thought about running for Council because others approached you and encouraged you to run. There wasn't a particular issue or problem that you were focused on outside of wanting to serve the City and community.
 - Others decided to run because you felt that particular issues needed to be addressed (e.g. public safety, affordable housing, base closure, etc.), and that your background and experience made you well suited to tackle those issues.

2. *How would you describe your decision-making process? What types of information are most helpful to you when making decisions? For example, do you prefer quantitative or qualitative information? Do you prefer summaries or more specific, detailed information?*
 - Most of you said that you use both quantitative and qualitative information depending on the nature of the issue or decision (is it complex? Is it new and unfamiliar? Is it controversial? Etc.).
 - Most of you said that you prefer summaries to detailed information, but that also depends on whether the issue is new, complex, or controversial. In those cases, detailed information is needed.
 - All of you said that you consult and rely on others to inform your decision making, primarily with staff but also including outside experts and community members, especially those affected by the policy or issue under consideration.

Norms for Council-to-Council Relations

3. *What norms should guide communication between Council members? That is, how should you and your Council colleagues engage with each other?*
 - Be transparent and communicate openly (within the constraints of the Brown Act)
 - Be respectful, even if you disagree
 - Assume good intentions
 - Listen and be open to the views of Council colleagues (does not indicate agreement)
 - Facilitate discussion and dialogue, not just refuting and rebutting each other
 - Move on after a conflict (avoid holding grudges; accept disagreement as part of the job)
 - Move on after the vote (accept the majority decision)
 - Be prepared for meetings, attend and be actively engaged
 - Question motives and intentions offline, one-on-one (not in public)
 - Practice the Golden Rule – treat others as you wish to be treated

4. *What do you see as ineffective communication between Council members? That is, what sorts of behaviors should you and your Council colleagues avoid?*
 - Personal attacks and antagonistic communication (focus instead on the merits of issue)
 - Talking badly about colleagues to others “behind their backs” (address colleagues directly instead)
 - Being dishonest, manipulative, and withholding information (the opposite of transparency)

Norms for Council-to-Staff Communication

5. *How should you and your Council colleagues communicate with staff? What norms, should guide these kinds of interaction?*
 - Communicate through the City Manager when engaging with Department Heads and Executive Staff
 - Apply the same Council-to-Council norms when communicating with staff
 - Approach staff as a co-equal partner with Council; avoid “power plays”
 - Ensure Council and staff understand and adhere to their respective roles and responsibilities (i.e. politics and policy vs. administration and operations)

6. *What do you and your Council colleagues need from staff to be most effective?*
 - Provide accurate and timely information, reports, analyses, and recommendations
 - Be available and responsive to Council’s questions (e.g. “no dumb questions”)
 - Provide the background and history on significant issues and decisions (can be links or supplemental materials; does not have to be in staff reports)
 - Ensure Council is informed in advance about actions that will impact the community (e.g. street closures)