



City of Alameda
City Council Workshop
December 18, 2019

December 2019

**Management
Partners**



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Workshop Report

Workshop Overview

The City of Alameda held a Council workshop on Wednesday, December 18, 2019, from 12:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Alameda City Hall West. The purpose of the workshop was to have a collaborative discussion about City priorities for the next year and to identify Council norms.

Workshop Objectives

- Reach agreement on norms for working together and working with staff on behalf of the community.
- Clarify roles and enhance trust.
- Discuss opportunities and challenges on the horizon for the City of Alameda.
- Set priorities for 2020-21.

Participants

Active workshop participants included the following:

- Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft
- Vice Mayor John Knox White
- Councilmember Jim Oddie
- Councilmember Malia Vella
- Councilmember Tony Daysog
- City Manager Eric Levitt
- City Attorney Yibin Shen

City Clerk Lara Weisiger opened and recorded the meeting and department heads were present for the discussion of priorities to hear the discussion and provide information as requested by Councilmembers.



Facilitation

Nancy Hetrick of Management Partners facilitated the workshop with support from Lisa Phan.

Workshop Agenda

- Welcome by the Mayor and Call to Order
- Public Comment
- Workshop Overview
- Icebreaker – Hidden Gems
- FY 2020-21 Priorities
- Effective Practices for Elected Officials
- Wrap-Up and Next Steps
- Adjournment by the Mayor

Ground Rules

- Seek consensus
- Listen to understand
- Participate
- Stay focused
- Assume good intent
- Speak up if we need a course correction

Workshop Preparation

Before the workshop, Nancy Hetrick discussed workshop objectives with the City Manager and used an online survey to obtain input about Councilmembers' priorities to help develop workshop materials. The Mayor provided feedback on the draft survey and agenda before they were finalized.

Welcome by the Mayor and Call to Order

The workshop began with a welcome and a call to order by Mayor Marilyn Ezzy Ashcraft and opened public comment. No members from the public were present, so Mayor Ashcraft turned the session over to the facilitator and City Manager Eric Levitt.

Comments from the City Manager

City Manager Levitt welcomed and thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the workshop. He highlighted the value of investing time away to discuss priorities. Eric underscored the importance of aligning Council priorities to the budget and shared that he and department heads are preparing their workplan using the Council priorities as a framework.

Icebreaker – Hidden Gems

Councilmembers were asked to identify a hidden gem in the City; something they enjoy or are most proud of. City Manager Levitt and City Attorney Shen were also invited to share hidden gems. Below are highlights from the icebreaker.

Proud of:

- City staff/team
- Alameda transportation plans and projects

Enjoy:

- Little jetty path next to Crab Cove
- West-end Library
- Mosley's Café on the water (before it closed)
- Jean Sweeney Open Space Park
- Having the ability to bike all around town
- People of the community adding to the City's quality of life
- City Hall building that has a rich historical background
- Children's story hour at the Library

Establish Priorities for FY 2020-21

In advance of the workshop, Management Partners administered a short survey to seek input on which of the City's current initiatives (identified by staff) are the highest priority for the coming year. The City Manager observed that with limited staffing resources available, affirming Council priorities and ensuring a shared understanding of what can be accomplished is essential.

The initiatives identified as a "high priority" by three or more Councilmembers were the focus of discussion at the workshop. For those initiatives, Nancy asked Councilmembers to discuss what they would

consider to be success and what can be accomplished in the next year.
Table 1 summarizes the discussion.

Table 1. Priorities Discussion on Survey Results

Focus Area (Goals)	Initiative(s)	What success looks like in the next year
Focus Area 1. Preparing Alameda for the Future	*Traffic safety/ Vision Zero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the number of collisions to zero. • Implement recommendations and changes provided by staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Daylighting ○ Getting rid of push buttons ○ Painting crosswalks ○ Traffic lighting solutions • Improve communication with the community regarding traffic safety improvements and changes that are implemented. • Implement short-term strategies while pursuing long-term goals. • Partner with the school district to improve traffic safety around schools. • Promote discussions about carpools and safe routes to school. • Transform streets by being strategic and innovative about finding new/ different ways of approaching traffic safety problem(s). • Continue infrastructure improvements (i.e., is street lighting bright enough?). • Identify resources needed to address traffic safety and improvements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff. Need professional staff to conduct research and gather data to recommend changes and implement them. ○ Data. Data provides focus to solve the problem.
	Long-term financial strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to anticipate the next economic downturn by understanding in advance the City's core services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ City's core services need to be identified ○ Review City spending • Develop a longer-term financial plan after working with a financial planner. • Identify values for financial planning – values-based budgeting. • Identify a dashboard model for financial spending and investments.
Focus Area 2. Encouraging Economic Development Across the Island	New ferry terminal at Seaplane Lagoon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify funding for parking management at the new terminal.
	Development at Alameda Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define/identify a shared vision (City Council and staff) about how to accomplish short- and long-term goals for Alameda Point. • Create a plan for infrastructure needs; look at underground infrastructure for improvements. • Maintain the choice to provide affordable housing. • Increase array of options for potential developers (economic development). • Figure out how to move current plans forward (RESHAP housing).
	Maintain active business districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safety for business districts. • Explore vacancy tax. • Shopping mall challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify what the City can provide for commercial landowners. ○ Identify business incentives and how they impact large/small businesses.

Focus Area (Goals)	Initiative(s)	What success looks like in the next year
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the dichotomy between large and small businesses. Code enforcement can impact small businesses more significantly than large businesses. • Identify new partnerships with businesses. • Support business districts versus commercial districts and identify strategies available to help them. • Identify business improvement areas (BIA) • Enlist the support of the City prosecutor to enforce laws related to code enforcement.
Focus Area 3. Supporting Enhanced Livability and Quality of Life	Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that the City is losing rental housing units. • Address housing costs by limiting the number of licenses for short-term housing. • Consider options for more housing units (although this is a of more long-term plan). • Consider donating City land to a nonprofit to offset the cost of building affordable housing. • Have a focus of “housing first.” • Develop a housing plan by identifying what will be in the housing plan, number of units, land, etc. • Develop a funding plan. • Identify temporary shelters for the homeless population. • Support the Planning Board’s review of Article 26 in the City Charter (Measure A in 1973). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Look at the density limit and see how it factors into the housing plan. ○ Look at the capacity issue with all services, (i.e., businesses, bike, transportation choices plan, etc.). ○ Look into how live/work mixed-use services fit. • Evaluate the City’s short-term housing plan particularly as it relates to the military community, which has shorter-term rental needs. • Develop a deeper partnership with Housing Authority to the make the City’s needs known. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Section 8 housing waitlist is long. Evaluate the requirements for allowing room rentals by homeowners to be funded through Section 8 (to increase supply). ○ Discuss services associated with transitional/supportive housing.
	Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain more regular reports from the homeless outreach team (police and service providers) to measure progress and to increase communication and transparency between staff and City Council. • Since the City was chosen by the State of California to conduct the state’s first pilot program, the Community Paramedicine Program, consider advocating for the program at a statewide level. The program has been beneficial for the City. • Consider providing street medical services (not just medications), such as mental health and housing outreach to build relationships with the community.
Focus Area 4. Protecting Core Services	*Public safety; public safety recruitments; traffic enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support recruitment and retention by identifying ways to maintain current levels of service. • Improve diversity of the department. • Need staff to let City Council know if they need more help. • Develop a Fire Services Plan to discuss levels of service.

Focus Area (Goals)	Initiative(s)	What success looks like in the next year
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify ways to retain staff by considering compensation, and by improving the facilities and identifying what is needed (e.g., space capacity, women's room, infrastructure maintenance, etc.). Pay attention to the response time for public safety requests. Identify innovative ways for developing the next fire station (i.e., as part of a mixed-use residential/commercial space.)
Focus Area 5. Ensuring Effective and Efficient Operations	*Balanced budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expenditures. Make sure the City Council continues to review spending above a certain limit/threshold. Review the priorities and stay focused when reviewing/approving the budget. Mid-cycle budget. Identify how the budget can be tied to priorities/ initiatives. Find creative ways to increase revenue. Voters may be maxed out with taxes. Council needs to be aware of limits. Encourage the City Manager to be transparent when creating the budget. Make the budget easy to read when providing the departments and citywide budget. Check-in on values of the budget (early check-in); mid-cycle (values will be tied in). Finance ERP software is underway; it is a big project for staff and requires a lot of work.

*Initiatives that were identified by all Councilmembers as a high priority for next year.

In addition to the initiatives listed above, Councilmembers brought up some priorities they thought are equally important to keep in mind for the next year. Below highlights the remainder of the discussion.

- Develop and finish a **City Pool Facility Plan** by the end of 2020.
- Libraries.** Identify ways to become a community center.
- Recreation and Parks.** Continuing the work on improvements and maintenance.
- Parking program.** Parking ties into many of the City initiatives (i.e., Seaplane Lagoon Ferry Terminal, Alameda Point, business districts, etc.)
- Climate Action and Resiliency Plan.** Addressing the following:
 - Unfunded plan to plant 325 trees
 - Address resiliency projects
 - Work with the City Manager to address what the first phase is in the budget
- Develop a workload assessment between in-house staff compared with contractors when working on transportation safety projects. There might be a project overlap of goals and initiatives.



Review Effective Practices for Elected Officials

During this part of the session, Nancy divided the discussion into two parts: 1) a discussion of the articles she shared with Council before the workshop, and 2) a discussion about Council agreements.

Review of Articles

To inform the discussion around Council norms and practices, Management Partners distributed the following two articles for the Council to review in advance of the workshop:

- *“Attributes of Exceptional Councils”* from the Institute of Local Government, and
- *“A Key Ingredient for Success: An Effective City Council/City Manager Relationship”* by Kevin Duggan.

Both articles are included in ***Attachment A***.

During the workshop, Nancy asked Councilmembers to share their reactions to the articles. Below are highlights from the discussion.

- *Give the City Manager a clear direction of what the Councilmembers want.*
- The City Manager is doing a good job of listening to all Councilmembers without assuming and providing advice individually and collectively.
- *Recognize that you are now “different” from before you were elected.* Councilmembers acknowledged the need to switch perspectives from campaigning to an elected official representing the City.
- *Collaboration.* Work together to find a common solution.
- *Communication.* There should be no “gotcha” or surprises when communicating with each other, and everyone should be open to listening to each other.
- Liked the idea of having more Council teambuilding workshops/ retreats to continue to build trust.

- *Understanding roles and responsibilities.* Councilmembers expressed the need to have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities compared to that of the City Manager/staff.
 - Councilmembers would like a better understanding of the City Manager's role when working with Councilmembers individually and collectively as a group.
 - Have respect for Councilmembers' outside life (work and capacity), even though they are also committed to the City and their constituents. This is a volunteer job.
- Don't burn bridges with peers and operate in a political/civic vacuum. Respect disagreement and support the Council's final decision.
- Focus on current City challenges and not on old battles.
- Respect the Mayor's role and the extra amount of time invested in the community.

Council Norms Discussion

Nancy distributed a Council norms worksheet to each Council member to review and complete. The worksheet listed attributes for effective governance and asked each participant to assess whether they are doing it well or could do better. Table 2 lists the attributes for which three or more Councilmembers self-reported the same opinion on the worksheets.

Table 2. Results from Council Norms Activity

Areas we are currently doing well:	Areas we can do better:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a citywide perspective. • Have well-run meetings and discussions where everyone is heard, with Councilmembers recognized to speak. • Do our homework before coming to Council meetings. • Respect each other's opinions. Accept that we will not always agree, and then disagree respectfully and professionally. Do not make things personal. Do not criticize others for having a different point of view. • Find consensus when we can; find the area of agreement within the areas of disagreement. • Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement. • Inspire public confidence in our City government. • Work for the common good, not personal interest. • Participate in scheduled activities to increase Council effectiveness. • Share information with other Councilmembers about committee meetings attended. • Honor "discussion" before "decisions;" reserve making formal motions until initial discussions have taken place. • Approach the business of governing in a professional manner; conduct business in a way that brings honor to the institution of government. • Work together as a body, modeling teamwork and civility for our community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being open to compromise; look for commonalities; focus on a "team" win, not the individual; move from <i>I</i> to <i>we</i>, and move from campaigning to governing. • Have respect for the roles of Council and staff in creating policy and in implementing policy; Council to set the "what" not the "how" to accomplish tasks; respect the council/manager form of government. • Listen, be open-minded to each other, staff, the public. Communicate with each other. Seek to understand. • Check egos and electronics at the door. • Keep confidential things confidential. • Seek to be efficient in comments at Council meetings.

After completing the worksheet, Nancy asked if they had any thoughts. Councilmember Vella indicated she would have liked a third assessment option that indicated the attributes they are doing "adequately" but could still do better (or "we are doing better").

Discussion highlights are presented below.

Areas where Council can do better – discussion highlights:

- *Seek to be efficient in making comments at Council meetings.* Three Councilmembers agreed that Council could do better at this, and that questions on consent items should be addressed prior to City Council meetings.
- *Be open to compromise.*
- *Seek discussions where everyone is heard.* Time constraints need to be balanced so everyone has enough time to speak and be heard.

- Some Councilmembers think Council is doing better now than six to 12 months ago.
- Suggest changing the worksheet columns for future use to: Are we doing this adequately? Better? Better than before?
- The order of comments at a Council meeting can affect the discussion. It is important to allow time for response. Appreciation for the Mayor's approach of "going down the line" was expressed.
- It is harder to manage a discussion where one or more individuals are passionate about the topic. Some people are not given an equal amount of time to speak and be heard.

Areas where the City Manager could do better – discussion highlights:

- *Come to Council early on things – no surprises.*
 - It is helpful to get information early on regarding what staff is working on (i.e., projects); doesn't need to be "fully baked."
 - Without early input, staff may misunderstand or have unclear direction regarding Council expectations.
- *Tell the Council what resources are needed to do what the Council desires.* Be empowered to provide full candor while providing supporting documents for clarity.
- *Follow through on Council priorities.* Be transparent with the Council regarding the status of priorities and what can be accomplished. There was acknowledgement that staff wants to please.

Wrap-Up and Next Steps

The workshop concluded with Nancy sharing that a workshop summary report will be prepared by Management Partners to document the outcomes of the day.

Evaluation Summary

At the end of the meeting, all five Councilmembers completed an evaluation form. ***Attachment B*** provides the evaluation and all written comments.

Attachment A – Workshop Articles



Attributes of Exceptional Councils

Leading public organizations and governing with colleagues on a council is a challenging art of community service. The Institute recognizes that many aspects of leadership and governance are not intuitive. This piece is intended to provide councilmembers and city managers insight into the attributes of exceptional councils as well as provide practical tips to help them become exceptional.

1. Exceptional councils develop a sense of team – a partnership with the city manager to govern and manage the city

The mayor, councilmembers and city manager see themselves and work as a team as they undertake a series of tasks to further their common purpose. The individual team members work in a coordinated and collaborative manner with a high degree of respect, trust and openness. The team values diversity in style and perspective. The team thinks and acts strategically as it examines issues/situations and decides on a course of action serving their city's mission and goals.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Successfully transition from candidate to a member of the council.
- Become a champion of the city. Make decisions based on the needs and interests of the community at-large / the greater good.
- Develop, communicate and support policy goals and council decisions.
- Demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively (as a team) and have a citywide perspective.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Build capacity to create a more effective team. The governance team (mayor, councilmembers and city manager) should get to know each other; how each person approaches issues, decision making style and so on. This can be accomplished at annual meetings or workshops through-out the year. In the event that councilmembers disagree, clear ground rules (norms of behavior and practice) can help quell acrimony before it becomes a problem. It's important to remember that trust is built around understanding and respect, not necessarily agreement.

2. Exceptional councils have clear roles and responsibilities that are understood and adhered.

Exceptional councils understand their role is to serve as policy maker - to represent the values, beliefs and priorities of their community while serving in the community's best interest. They carry out a variety of responsibilities including: developing and adopting a vision for the city; focusing and aligning plans, policies, agreements and budgets in furtherance of this vision; and holding themselves and the city manager accountable for results.

Exceptional councils understand that the city manager is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the city. The city manager is responsible for undertaking and accomplishing the policy objectives of the council. Exceptional councils recognize the subject matter expertise of staff and utilize their knowledge and experience to guide and inform decision making.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Understand the role of local government and their responsibilities.
- Know their role- to set vision and policy, avoid micromanagement.
- Councilmembers should strive to be informed about the issues facing the city and be prepared to ask questions of staff and each other.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Create a shared understanding of the city manager's role and the council's expectations to optimize the working relationships. This shared understanding is informed by local charter and ordinance provisions that provide the overall framework for the relationship. The council should make time to have conversations during retreats and/or study sessions to define and/or reveal and refine their role and responsibilities. Since role clarity between the city council and city management is critical to mutual success, having clear protocols helps avoid misunderstandings.

3. Exceptional councils honor the relationship with staff and each other

Exceptional councils understand that a good working relationship with staff is vital for the city to be run successfully. Exceptional councils treat each other and staff with dignity and respect. They act with civility and a high level of professional decorum. Councilmembers build trust by not playing the “gotcha game” and strive to have a no secrets, no surprises approach as an operating norm. Finally, they respect the diversity of styles and perspectives among their colleagues and staff and are open to new ideas.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Councilmembers have the ability to respectfully disagree (to disagree without being disagreeable). They are able to leave it at the dais; debates are about policy, not personality.
- Exceptional councilmembers reflect positive decorum/model of leadership by providing respectful tone with colleagues.
- Establish a set of behaviors ahead of time, potentially documented in a code of conduct, to help promote civility and respect.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Set council priorities and strategic goals at an annual meeting; these goals and priorities are a tool to guide the city manager and staff on where to focus their efforts. This annual meeting provides time for the council to reflect on community priorities as well as offer an opportunity to discuss their decorum and their relationship among each other and the relationship between the city manager/staff and the council.

4. Exceptional councils routinely conduct effective meetings

Open and public meetings are central to democratic decision-making. Exceptional councils master the art of effective meetings. They develop and adhere to meeting protocols and processes. They spend time planning and organizing the agenda with the aim of having a more focused meeting. They allocate the council’s time and energy appropriately (focused on the council’s role and responsibilities) and meeting short- and long-term priorities. They honor the public’s participation and engagement and they generally start on time and are held during reasonable hours.

Exceptional councils use public meetings not only for their intended purpose, information sharing and decision-making.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Councilmembers are respectful of each other, the public and everyone’s time.
- Councilmembers use engaging body language as a way to demonstrate respect.
- Issues are not personalized, thoughtful dialogue is the objective.
- Agenda packets are read, councilmembers come prepared and have an open mind
- Respect is demonstrated for varied opinions.
- Everyone strives to be civil and act with decorum.

but they also use the meeting to demonstrate respect and civility for each other, staff and the public. Exceptional councilmembers prepare in advance of the meeting, remain focused on the city goals and objectives and mindful of their role and responsibilities.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Develop and adopt (with regular reviews and updates), guidelines for conducting meetings and making decisions. These governance protocols typically address meeting procedures (agenda preparation, how to put issues on the agenda, debate and voting procedures (parliamentary rules) and standards of decorum (civility)). As part of a regular self-assessment, councils should evaluate their meetings and their effectiveness and adjust behavior and practices for better results.

5. Exceptional councils hold themselves and the city accountable

Exceptional councils operate openly, ethically and work to engage the community in a myriad of decisions impacting the prosperity and well-being of their community. Toward that end, exceptional councils consistently provide short- and long-term strategic direction and goals, as well as provide budget, program and policy oversight.

Exceptional councils hold themselves accountable for the conduct, behavior and effectiveness of the council. They establish clear priorities and goals and hold the city manager accountable for results. And finally, they embrace accountability as a process and tool to calibrate ongoing efforts to address and meet policy and program objectives.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Councilmembers operate ethically and with integrity.
- Councils conduct team building / goal setting exercise to track progress towards mutually agreed upon goals
- Councils taking responsibility for the results (good and bad).
- Councils celebrate success.
- Councilmembers hold themselves responsible for adhering to operating protocols and codes of conduct.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Annually evaluate council and city manager performance toward achieving the city's priorities and goals (consider having this be part of an annual goal setting meeting). Council should consider assessing its own behavior and effectiveness as part of its annual self-assessment.

6. Exceptional councils have members who practice continuous personal learning and development

Governance is not intuitive. In addition, the policy and economic environment impacting cities are ever changing. Exceptional councils continually provide the opportunity to build their knowledge and skills, to enhance their understanding of key issues, increase their awareness of best practices and sharpen their leadership and governance skills.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- Stay informed on key issues
- Gain key insights and knowledge on all aspects of governing, from budgets to plans and everything in between.
- Learning to listen is sometimes more important than learning to give a speech.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Seek out national, state and local professional growth and educational opportunities. These opportunities can focus on the nuts and bolts of governing to helping you gain valuable information and/or insights on key policy issues facing your city. In addition, city run orientations for newly elected officials provide a good way to acclimate new members to the council's norms and protocols as well as the budget and key policy issues.

A Key Ingredient for Success: An Effective City Council/City Manager Relationship

Kevin C. Duggan
ICMA West Coast Regional Director
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Introduction

Mayors and councilmembers need to have effective working relationships with a number of key audiences in order to successfully undertake their responsibilities. These audiences include citizens/voters, community groups, the press, other governmental agencies, other elected officials, nonprofit organizations and many more. However, critical to a successful and satisfying career on the city council in a city council/city manager form of government is a successful and effective working relationship with the city manager. This article suggests the necessary ingredients for a mutually successful council/manager working relationship.

The City Council/City Manager Form of Local Government:

The "Council/Manager Form of Government" is designed for the elected city council to set policy direction as the direct representatives of the community with the city manager providing the professional expertise to manage the organization and carry out the council's direction. Policy direction is provided in a variety of ways, including through local laws/ordinances, planning policies (general plan and zoning), financial policies, the annual budget and capital improvement plan, the adoption of city council policies and through numerous other program directives.

The city manager is responsible for carrying out the council's policy direction through the day-to-day management of city functions, including the oversight of city operating departments. Key tasks associated with this role include the hiring and supervision of department heads, the recommendation and implementation of the annual budget and the assurance of quality service delivery. This form of government is predicated on the philosophy that elected representatives are better able to make community value judgments on behalf of residents and translate these values into policy direction—the "what" in city government. It is also based on the belief that professional staff are best able to determine the "how" of implementing policies and delivering day-to-day services due to their experience and training. Since both roles are closely related, it is the city manager's responsibility to coordinate between both realms to assure the effective delivery of services consistent with city council direction.

This is often referred to as the policy/administration dichotomy (the separation of these responsibilities)—which, oftentimes, has a good deal of "gray" on the boundaries. When it works most effectively, the elected officials focus on big picture of policy

development and minimize their role relating to administrative implementation while the staff works to avoid an undue influence on policy development while focusing on policy implementation and service delivery. While the line between the two can become blurred, the city council/city manager system is subject to failure if the line is disregarded.

If the city council and the city manager have an effective and mutually supportive working relationship, the likelihood of the policy and administrative roles being effectively coordinated increases significantly, resulting in a more successful city governance and management.

Among the issues to consider in trying to establish the best possible city council/city manager working relationship are the following:

- The relationship cannot be taken for granted and requires attention and work to establish and maintain. If not diligently pursued, it will not be accomplished.
- The work of city councils is not easy! Not only do you confront the typical challenges of group decision-making, but the "group" in this case may not have a great deal in common. Also, the issues can be weighty and controversial. The decision-making is also done in public, often on TV or the Web, scrutinized by the public and press, and anyone can join in on the deliberations.
- Among the factors that can get in the way of an effective relationship include:
 - Not understanding/appreciating/respecting each other's roles.
 - Differing philosophies.
 - Differing personalities.
 - Challenging issues.
 - External pressures from the media, community groups, employee organizations, etc.
- Fully appreciate that you need to establish a good working relationship with your fellow councilmembers and the city manager in order to maximize:
 - Organizational performance.
 - Organizational reputation.
 - Value to the community.

- Personal reputation.
- Community pride and confidence.
- Don't underestimate how important it is to a city manager to have a good working relationship with the city council. It has been reported that the relationship with the city council is the primary factor impacting a city manager's job satisfaction. Among the reasons for this are the following:
 - City councils are the source of formal performance feedback. Like almost everyone, positive feedback from supervisor(s) is very important.
 - City councils control the city manager's job security.
 - City councils determine the city manager's compensation.
 - City councils establish the city manager's "parameters of success."
 - City council support for the city manager, particularly during tough times, is of tremendous value.

Recommended Practices:

So while the stakes are high and the challenges significant, there are a variety of "best practices" and techniques that can improve the odds of your individual success as a mayor or councilmember, as well as the success of the city council and city as a whole.

The following are offered as ideas to consider in your efforts to establish and maintain a strong and effective working relationship with your city manager:

- **Recognize that you are now "different" than before you were elected (and more than you may realize):**

You are now viewed as a community/city leader and what you do and say can have a much greater impact. Your comments will now be viewed as representing "the city." What you do and say will also be more closely scrutinized. You should be aware that the city staff will view you much differently now that you are one of the organization's leaders. Even an offhand comment can be viewed as a directive for action. So even though you may not view yourself any differently than before you were elected, don't underestimate to what degree others are viewing you differently.

- **Understand and respect the city council/city manager plan of governance:**

It is critical for you to understand why your city is organized under this plan of governance and how it should operate. It is important to understand and appreciate the distinction between policymaking and implementation and the different roles played by individual councilmembers, the city council as a whole, the city manager and the city staff.

- **Allow time for you and the city manager to get to know each other and develop a working relationship:**

Try not to overly rely on what you have heard from others regarding what it will be like to work with the manager—others' views may or may not be accurate. Most city managers understand the need to work very hard to adjust to the issues, concerns and priorities of the new city council. Try to be open-minded to your ability to establish a productive and effective working relationship with the manager.

- **City managers will do their best to carry out the policy direction of the city council (even when there is a major change in policy direction):**

Professional city managers are committed to carry out the policy direction of the city council regardless if they personally agree or disagree with the policy as long as what they are asked to implement is:

- Legal.
- Ethical.
- Within their/the city's authority.

It is often misunderstood that when a city manager effectively implements a city council's policy, the manager personally agrees with the policy or can only implement city services consistent with that policy. City managers can change the organization's approach to an issue as may be directed by a new city council. Avoid overly associating the city manager with the policies that the city has previously implemented at the direction of the previous council.

- **Take your role seriously, but not yourself:**

This common advice is particularly important for mayors and councilmembers. While you are doing important and serious work on behalf of the community, you will do it better and more effectively if you keep the normal "ups and downs" and "wins and losses" in perspective. You were elected to make tough decisions on

oftentimes controversial issues. It's a given that you will be criticized and there will be those who vehemently disagree with your decisions. That is unavoidable. Develop a thick skin and do your best to not take personally the conflicts and disagreements that are a normal part of your new role. If you don't develop a thick skin, you will overreact to criticism.

Additionally, you are now part of an organization and will be blamed/criticized for the actions of the organization that you had nothing to do with. That is the reality of your new role and you should keep that in mind.

And remember, the city manager is not always to blame when things go wrong, though he/she should take appropriate responsibility for the organization's actions. It can be easy to focus your frustration on the city manager. You will be happier and more effective if you can experience the normal "ups and downs" of city life without needing to always find someone at fault.

Whatever the issue or encounter, try not to take it personally. Try to keep personal likes and dislikes out of the equation. Your fellow councilmembers and the city manager are not your family or personal friends; they are your "professional colleagues," and you need to work effectively with them even if you would not select them as friends.

Lastly, always "live to fight another day." There are always future issues to decide; focus on those versus the votes already taken. And always remember not to burn bridges due to a difficult defeat; you will need those "bridges" for future votes!

- **Appreciate the legitimate difference between the "community perspective" and the "professional/technical" perspective:**

While you will primarily view issues from your perspective as a resident/citizen in a manner similar to the other residents of the community, the city staff will often have a more "technical/professional" perspective. What might make a great deal of sense to the staff looking at an issue from a purely "business" point of view may not be the right answer based on community perspectives and values. While the city manager will do his or her best to bridge the gap between the two points of view, it is very helpful for councilmembers to understand that while the staff should be sensitive to community values, they will often raise issues based on their professional training that can differ from a purely community values point of view. An appreciation for these varied perspectives is critical to the council-staff relationship. That does not mean the one perspective is "right" while the other is "wrong"; but both parties should try to understand and appreciate the views of the other.

- **Don't fall into the trap of feeling you are VERY special:**

While being elected to a city council is an honor bestowed upon you by the voters, keep that "honor" in perspective. Citizens view electing you as showing trust in your judgment in representing their interests in community decision-making. They did not elect you because they felt you were personally deserving of special rights and privileges. Don't expect the city manager or staff to be able to assist you in ways outside your formal role on the city council. By and large, they will be required to treat you just the same as any other citizen on matters outside the realm of your official duties. Any compensation and "perks" of office should be visible and public.

- **Professional city managers will not "play favorites":**

Professional city managers will strive to have a positive working relationship with all the members of the city council regardless of personality, philosophy or positions on specific issues. They will also not let personal likes or dislikes affect how he or she interacts with councilmembers, and you should not expect the manager to act otherwise.

- **It is critical to city managers to have clear policy direction:**

The city manager and the city organization cannot carry out the policy direction of the city council if that direction is not clearly established. The clearer the direction, the more effectively the manager and staff can implement. Even when the council is split on an issue, the majority's will needs to be clearly stated. The manager should seek clarification from the city council when necessary.

- **Be sensitive to the need for city managers to sometimes tell you "what you don't want to hear":**

One of the least favorite tasks for a city manager is to tell an individual councilmember or the council as a whole something they don't want to hear. This could range from a mistake the organization has made to informing a councilmember that something they want done (or want to do) cannot be done or is not appropriate. While city managers try to be as flexible as possible in meeting the needs of the city council, you will not be well served by a manager who will not tell you when something is not appropriate or cannot be achieved simply to avoid appearing uncooperative. While the manager needs to be clear why the request cannot be fulfilled, it is very helpful for you to understand that the manager has a professional obligation to give you advice contrary to what you would like to hear when he/she is so required.

- **Why managers can't always do what you want them to do:**

The manager can often be confronted with a situation of an individual council-member wanting something done that is not consistent with the wishes of the city council. The manager needs to respond to the direction of the city council as a whole. While managers try to be as responsive as possible to the needs/desires of individual members, on matters of any consequence, the direction of the city council will often be required.

- **Take your role to evaluate your city manager's performance seriously:**

Like any other employee, the city manager benefits from regular and thoughtful performance evaluations. Performance evaluations are an important communication tool between the manager and council. Working for multiple individuals is challenging enough without clear and consistent feedback on performance. At least annual evaluations should be conducted. This provides the opportunity to communicate how the council views the manager's performance, including areas of strength and areas for potential additional emphasis. This is also the only opportunity for the council as a whole to provide this input in private. Also, due to the inherent challenge of multiple individuals attempting to evaluate an individual who works for them as a group, the use of a consultant to facilitate the evaluation can be very helpful. If done right, evaluations can be a very valuable communication mechanism for the council and manager.

- **Tolerance for organizational imperfection (mistakes!):**

While no one likes mistakes, they are unavoidable in the context of organizational life. Cities are complex organizations dealing with a wide variety of services with unique and sometimes challenging clientele. It is not a matter of whether mistakes will be made, but when. It is critical as a leader of your city that you react to mistakes appropriately. While mistakes should be avoided to the greatest extent possible, overreacting can cause further damage. You should expect that mistakes will be addressed promptly, fully disclosed and that steps will be taken to avoid repeating the same mistakes again. You will need to trust the manager to follow up and effectively address the situation when organizational miscues occur. Have high expectations but recognize that mistakes will occur, even in the best organizations, and try not to overreact when they do.

- **Support of reasonable risk-taking:**

High-performing organizations will occasionally need to take "reasonable risks" in order to achieve community objectives. Sometimes these endeavors will not be successful. However, organizations that avoid ANY unnecessary risk are not likely to accomplish a great deal. While city councils need to be informed and concur that the risk being taken is reasonable for the potential benefit being gained, councils should also be understanding that projects and initiatives that have inherent unknowns may not always turn out as hoped. Intolerance for any

mistakes/risk will breed an overly conservative organization and will stifle creativity and flexibility and the benefits these values can bring.

- **Try to focus feedback on service quality, not individuals:**

An ongoing challenge is the difficulty of reconciling the ultimate responsibility of the city council for city service quality versus the need to avoid interfering in the daily management of the organization. It is much better for the city council to communicate service level or quality concerns to the city manager versus performance judgments regarding individual staff members. It is particularly inappropriate for individual members or the council as a whole to try to direct the manager to hire, fire, or promote members of the city staff.

- **Don't expect managers to take sides in councilmember disputes:**

Regardless of how they may personally feel, most city managers will avoid, at all costs, "taking sides" in disputes between councilmembers. While on occasion the manager might try to help reconcile councilmembers, don't expect the manager to take your side in a dispute with a fellow member. Even if they may agree with you, most managers will avoid taking part in public or private criticism of councilmembers unless professionally required to do so in extreme cases.

- **Don't jump to conclusions regarding citizen/customer feedback:**

While it is your responsibility to be available to listen to citizen and customer feedback regarding the city organization, be careful not to jump to conclusions based on what you are told. Oftentimes an individual may sound completely sincere and credible while providing you an inaccurate account of their experience with the city organization. It is best to not jump to conclusions, one way or the other, until the manager is able to provide you a response to the concern. It is embarrassing to criticize staff for poor performance only to find out that the information you relied on was not accurate. At the same time, the manager needs to not be overly defensive regarding staff performance until he or she also has heard "both sides of the story."

- **Don't expect the manager to exercise "political leadership":**

While managers are inherently leaders of their organizations and, to varying degrees, in their communities, their role is not to be political leaders. That is, it is not intended for the manager to be "out front" on community policy issues. Sometimes city councils want managers to take leadership (advocate publicly) on controversial issues to avoid potential political consequences to themselves. While tempting, this is contrary to the intent of the council/manager form of government under which the elected officials are to take the lead on purely policy matters.

- **Disagree with the recommendation/don't attack the "messenger":**

When dealing with a difficult issue at a council meeting, it can be tempting to not only disagree with the recommendation being presented, but also to challenge/discredit the manager or staff member presenting the recommendation. The best practice is to focus your comments on the recommendation, not the individual. Having a policy discussion devolve into a personal attack is uncomfortable and embarrassing to everyone involved. Even if you are frustrated by the recommendation, it is poor form to attack the presenter. If you do have concerns regarding how a recommendation was developed or presented, that should be provided privately to the manager.

P.S.: Don't play "stump the staff" by trying to ask questions at the meeting that you think staff will have difficulty answering on the spot. It doesn't really make you look smarter, nor is it helpful to the deliberations to ask a question that cannot be answered. While staff members should work diligently to anticipate questions, it is not possible to anticipate all possible questions. If you really want the answer, get the question answered before the meeting or provide a heads up regarding what you will be asking.

- **Conduct yourself at council meetings in a professional/businesslike manner:**

Even on very controversial topics with greatly varying opinions, the council deliberation can be and should be "businesslike" and professional. While it may be more entertaining (possibly from a reality TV perspective) to see councilmembers and citizens yelling and having temper tantrums, it gets in the way of thoughtful deliberations and only tends to lower the respect for the council and city in the eyes of your constituents.

- **Consider the use of council team-building and goal-setting workshops:**

Recognizing the importance of both effective councilmember/councilmember and council/city manager working relationships, often an investment of time in team-building workshops is very worthwhile. These workshops allow for a thoughtful conversation of working relationships outside the context of discussing specific issues. These discussions can help create a better understanding of work styles and perspectives.

Additionally, recognizing that clear direction and priorities are critical for effective council/manager relations, goal-setting workshops can be very effective forums for establishing city council and organizational priorities.

- **Have a clear understanding with the manager of the type and frequency of communication you prefer:**

While a fundamental value of city managers is to provide regular and complete information equally to each councilmember, councilmembers can vary significantly regarding the type and frequency of contact with the manager they desire. While the manager will use written reports in one form or another as a base line of information to all the members, it is important for the manager to understand your preference for how information should be communicated, including the frequency of personal contact. While some members prefer regular "face-to-face" contact with the city manager, others prefer less time-intensive information-sharing methods. While sharing the same information among all councilmembers, it is helpful for you and the manager to understand how much and what type of contact you prefer.

- **Do your homework:**

It takes time and effort to be a successful councilmember. It makes the manager's and staff's job a lot easier if you have reviewed the reports and related materials provided to you prior to the city council meeting. This facilitates efficient meetings, accelerates decision-making and gives the impression that staff and council are working well as a team. Additionally, it will avoid you appearing unprepared to your fellow councilmembers, the staff and your constituents.

- **Trust above all:**

As in all relationships, an effective city council/manager relationship must be based on trust. Other potential obstacles such as differing personalities, styles, philosophies, etc., can be overcome if there is mutual trust. Without trust, little else will be successful. Both parties need to treat each other with respect and be truthful and forthcoming in their dealings.

- **No Surprises:**

Both the manager and council should do their best to make sure that important information is not first learned from others. While in this age of instant communication this is more difficult, and in some cases impossible, the parties should do their best to make sure that noteworthy information to which they are privy is not communicated to other organizational leaders by third parties (particularly the media). The manager needs to work hard to make sure that the council is not taken off guard while councilmembers should keep the city manager in the loop as well. "Surprises" can have a very negative impact on the working relationship in that it speaks directly to the trust issue.

- **Work through the city manager to get things done:**

While practice and philosophy can vary to some degree between cities, councilmembers should generally work through the city manager to obtain action by staff. Individual councilmembers are not authorized to direct staff, though routine referral of citizen requests (or to simply request information) is sometimes appropriate depending on local practice. Coordinating through the manager will make sure the issue is sent to the right staff person for action and will allow the manager to confirm timely follow-up. This also helps the manager stay informed regarding issues of community concern.

- **Council/Mayor Role:**

It is also important to make sure there is clarity between the council, the manager and the mayor on respective roles. At times there can be a conflict between the role the mayor views themselves as playing and the expectations of the remainder of the council. It is difficult if the manager gets caught in a dispute over these respective roles. In particular, how the city manager relates to the mayor versus the other councilmembers needs to be clear.

- **Don't blame the manager or staff for carrying out the direction of the city council:**

The city manager and staff are required to faithfully carry out the direction of the city council, regardless if they did or did not recommend it and regardless if some councilmembers oppose it. Respect the staff for faithfully carrying out the will of the council, whether or not you share the view of the council majority.

- **If the council/manager relationship is not going well:**

If you or the council are having difficulty with the city manager, try your best to resolve the issue. First of all, find an appropriate way to communicate the concerns. The manager can't respond if he/she is not aware of the concern. As noted earlier, try to obtain clear council consensus for the expectations for the manager and communicate those expectations clearly. Try to be optimistic regarding the possibility of the manager making adjustments to satisfy the concerns of the council and give sufficient time to do so. Additionally, provide the manager opportunities to respond to the feedback and communicate how he/she will address the concerns.

- **If all else fails and there needs to be a "parting of the ways":**

A forced separation of the manager is not a good experience for the council, the manager or the city. It can be costly, controversial and can cast everyone in a negative light. It can also erode citizen confidence in the city. Assuming all

reasonable steps have been taken to avoid a forced transition and recognizing a parting based on "irreconcilable differences" is always better than an "ugly, contested divorce" (in an "ugly divorce," both parties end up looking bad), keep the following in mind:

- Keep it professional.
- Don't unnecessarily damage the manager's reputation—it is not needed to make a change.
- Provide a reasonable period of time for the manager to find another position or provide reasonable severance—it takes time to find a manager's job.
- Remember, how you handle the transition of the current manager will have an impact on the quality of the candidate pool for the next manager.

Summary/Concluding Thoughts:

An unstable council/manager relationship has negative consequences for the city council, the manager, the organization and the community. A positive and mutually supportive relationship will increase the odds of having a high-performing and successful city. Councilmembers and the manager need to make creating, supporting and sustaining the relationship a high priority. If made a high priority, the odds of success are great.

Remember that your service on the city council is a unique honor that has been bestowed on you by your fellow citizens. While it is often a challenge, with inherent difficulties, someone needs to do it and your community has selected you for that responsibility. You have been selected to serve in a professional and honorable manner, during good times and bad. Your service on the city council will be over soon enough. Conduct yourself in a manner that will allow you to look back with pride—not only for what you accomplished, but also the way in which you conducted yourself (which will likely be remembered the longest).

January 2017

Attachment B – Workshop Evaluation

At the end of the workshop participants were asked to complete a workshop evaluation form. The following responses are a compilation of answers from five of the workshop participants.

Overall usefulness of the workshop (**4.7 average score**)



Overall quality of the workshop (**4.5 average score**)



The best thing about this workshop was...

- Having uninterrupted dialogue about our priorities.
- Discussion of effective practices for elected officials and establishing City Council norms.
- Letting Council talk.
- Well planned and organized. Open and honest dialogue.
- Ability to talk through priorities.

Some things that could have been better...

- More time for communications discussion.
- Room temperature.
- Regarding establishing priorities, questionnaire may have had some redundancies.
- A warmer room!

Other Comments...

- Need to do these two times a year.