The Relationship Between the City Council and City Management

Panelists:

- Nelson Fialho, City Manager, Pleasanton
- Kathy Narum, Council Member, Pleasanton
- Moderator: Kevin Duggan, ICMA West Coast Regional Director, ICMA
To Begin With

- Congratulations
- An Honor and a Responsibility
- Not Necessarily an Easy Adjustment
- It Takes Time and Effort

Session Outline:

- Introduction
- A “Manager’s Perspective”
- A “Councilmember’s Perspective”
- Panel Discussion Questions
- Questions From the Audience
What You Need to Know About Your City Manager

• What You May Already Perceive May Not Be Accurate
• Managers Put a Very High Priority on Having a Good Working Relationship With Councilmembers
• Have an Open Mind
• They Represent the Policy Positions of the CURRENT City Council
• Take the Time to Develop a Relationship
• You Will Succeed or Fail as a Team
From a Manager's Perspective: Optimal Performance:

- Elected Officials Focus on the Big Picture/Not Detailed Implementation (Administration)
- City Manager/Staff Avoid Undue Influence on Policy Development—Focus on Policy Implementation and Service Delivery

From a Manager's Perspective: Suggestions

- Understand and Respect the Council/Manager Plan of Governance
- Allow Time for You and the Manager to Get to Know Each Other and Develop a Working Relationship
- City Managers Do Their Best to Carry Out the Policy Direction of the Council—Even When It Changes
From a Manager’s Perspective: Suggestions

• Appreciate the Legitimate Difference Between “Community Perspective” and “Professional/Technical Perspective”

• The Critical Importance of Clear Policy Direction

• Be Sensitive to the Need for City Managers to Sometimes Tell You “What You Don’t Want to Hear”

From a Manager’s Perspective: Suggestions

• Don’t Jump to Conclusions Regarding Citizen/Customer Feedback

• Don’t Expect the Manager to Exercise “Political Leadership”

• Have a Clear Understanding With the Manager Regarding the Type and Frequency of Communication You Prefer

• If the Relationship is Not Going Well, Communicate Your Concerns and Provide Opportunities for the Manager to Address Them
From a Manager’s Perspective:
Conclusion:

- Organizational Performance
- Organizational Reputation
- Value to the Community
- Personal Reputation
- Community Pride and Confidence

From a Council Member’s Perspective:
Optimal Performance:

- Council Sets Policy/Overall Direction (Staff Offers Professional Advice, But Does Not Dominate Public Discussions)
- Manager and Staff Implements Policy and Day-to-Day Operations
- The Key for Both Parties is to “Find That Line” and Stay Within Your Areas of Responsibility
From a Council Member’s Perspective: Suggestions:

• Recognize That You Are Now “Different” Than Before You Were Elected

• But Don’t Fall Into the Trap of Feeling You Are VERY Special

• Take Your Role Seriously, But Not Yourself

From a Council Member’s Perspective: Suggestions:

• Be Prepared and Do Your Homework!

• Conduct Yourself at Council Meetings in a Professional/Businesslike Manner

• Disagree With the Recommendation, But Don’t “Attack the Messenger” (Critique the Idea, Not the Person)
From a Council Member’s Perspective: Suggestions:

• Decisions: It’s About the Majority, Not the Individual

• Remember, the City Manager Has 5, 7 or ? “Bosses”

• Support Reasonable Risk Taking By the Manager and Staff

• Model Tolerance for Organizational Imperfection (Mistakes!)

From a Council Member’s Perspective: Conclusion:

• Celebrate Success!

• See the Humor in Your Failures/Use Those Experiences as Learning Moments

• Have Fun!! Enjoy Your Experience—you worked hard to get here!!
Digging a Little Deeper: Discussion

• What Are the Most Important Things the Manager Can Do to Help the Council be Successful?

• What Are the Most Important Things the Council Can Do to Help the Manager/Staff be Successful?

• What Should the Manager Do if a Councilmember Attempts to Direct a Staff Member (Including the City Manager)?

• What Should a Council Member Do If They Are Hearing Concerns About a Staff Member?

• What Should A Council Member Do If They Are Concerned About Something the City Manager Said or Did?
Resources:

- ICMA (International City/County Management Association): [icma.org](https://icma.org)
- ILG (Institute for Local Government): [ca-ilg.org](https://ca-ilg.org)
- LCC (League of CA Cities): [cacities.org](https://cacities.org)