

City of San Mateo

Governance Workshop

June 4, 2024

The City of San Mateo, California, held a governance workshop on May 30, 2024. The primary purpose of the workshop was for the Council to create consensus on a Code of Conduct. That purpose was accomplished (see Appendix A) and this report summarizes the discussions during the session. The workshop was planned and facilitated by Jan Perkins and Susan Healy Keene of Raftelis.

Workshop Objectives

- To develop a shared understanding of each other's points of view
- Create consensus on Council values and code of conduct
- Build consensus on a path forward
- To strengthen teamwork

Agenda

- Welcome and call to order
- Public comments
- Comments from the City Manager
- Review guidelines for today's discussions
- Icebreaker
- Review best practices in governance
- Establish a set of Council values and an agreed upon Code of Conduct
- Council's next steps
- Wrap up

City Manager's Opening Comments

City Manager Alex Khojikian offered comments at the outset of the session. A summary follows.

The City Council are the leaders of a community and how Councilmembers treat each other sets the tone, has a tendency to permeate down to how community members treat each other and also cascades into the internal workings of an organization and how staff treat one another.

My expectation of the Council as your City Manager is that you are the leaders of the community and your roles as Councilmembers you govern for all. The expectation I have is that Council will lead with respect, civility and decorum, and we cannot lose sight of the reason why we are all here – and that is to serve the community of San Mateo.

As leaders, we all need to take responsibility for governing the City. The behavior of all of us in this room have a role to play and each of us need to look introspectively into how we can govern effectively and that it takes each of us to hold our individual selves accountable. We must all be open to change. There are many benefits of a Council working as a productive team. Some benefits are:

- *Differing perspectives and feedback from a team helps make stronger decisions.*

- *Good teamwork enhances group outcomes and the measurable effectiveness of organizations.*
- *Teamwork cultivates communication and strong working relationships, collaboration with positive intent, with respect, and active listening, a desire for mutual understanding and trust. When working together on a common goal or deliverable as an integrated whole, individual members consistently encourage and support each other.*
- *Expanded sense of accomplishment – contributing to something greater than ourselves.*

Council's role:

- *Work well together. Set policy and priorities – and then trust the City Manager to align resources and get the important work done.*
- *Work productively with the City Manager to reduce barriers to successful implementation of policy and achievement of priorities.*
- *Be supportive of City staff as they work to attain the priorities that have been identified and agreed upon.*

In order to attract and retain staff, one of the biggest selling points is having a City Council that works well together and that appreciates staff.

I look forward to our meeting today as we all work towards a common goal of serving the community of San Mateo by effectively working together.

Councilmembers' Hopes for the Day

During Jan Perkins' interviews with each member of Council, she asked them their hopes for the workshop. She reviewed a slide that contained a summary of their hopes, which were:

- Agreement on Council values
- Consensus on code of conduct for us
- Statement of who we are and how we lead, striving to be the best
- Assume the good intent of all of us
- Respectful, constructive conversations
- An ability for people to say difficult things to each other – but respectfully
- Everyone listens
- Agreement on follow up steps

Guidelines for Today

Next, Jan reviewed the guidelines (or ground rules) for the conversations during the day. These were:

Assume that each person brings good intent about the City
Be self-reflective and open to change
Work toward agreement
Show respect to each other
Listen first to understand before responding
Think about the impact of your actions and words

Jan asked participants to indicate their agreement in following these guidelines and all indicated *yes*. She encourages the Council and staff to consider today as a “reset” opportunity and think about the following quote as they move through their discussions today:

“If you do tomorrow what you did today, you will get tomorrow what you got today.” (Benjamin Franklin)

Icebreaker

Susan Healy Keene led the group in an icebreaker, asking each person to share what their first paid job was and what they learned from it.

Best Governance Practices

Next, participants reviewed elements and behaviors common in effective councils, as identified by the Institute for Local Government (ILG) below:

- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Adopted norms, protocols, and policies
- Unity of purpose
- Positive governance culture

During her interviews with the Council, Jan asked each member what the attributes of an effective City Council are. Attributes cited are shown below.

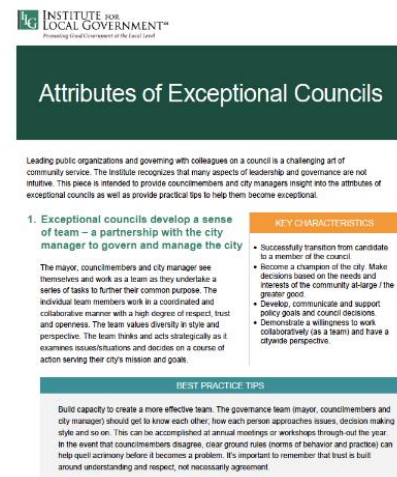
- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participatory with the public• Govern for the entire City• Consensus-oriented among the Council• Being united even when the vote is not unanimous• Being respectful to staff and each other in and out of Council meetings• Considering the whole organization, its capacity, being mindful of impacts on staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move from campaigning to governing• Once a decision is made, move on• Seek compromise to find agreement on what is possible• Do not decide until hearing from all• Build on each other’s good ideas• Vote on the merits of an issue• Be informed and educated about issues coming before Council• Accountable |
|--|--|

The Institute for Local Government cites characteristics of effective councils, as noted below.



Participants then reviewed the ILG article, *“Attributes of Exceptional Councils,”* which states that exceptional councils:

1. **Have a sense of team**, a partnership with each other and the city manager to govern and manage the city
2. **Have clear roles and responsibilities** that are understood and adhered to
3. **Honor the relationship** with staff and each other
4. **Routinely conduct effective meetings**
5. **Hold themselves and the city accountable**, for the conduct, behavior and effectiveness of the council, and for results of established priorities and goals
6. **Practice continuous personal learning and development**



Councilmembers and staff then each stated what resonated with them about this article. Comments included:

- Continuous learning and being open to receiving comments from others
- Honoring clear roles and responsibilities
- Being accountable and holding each other accountable
- Ok to say “I don’t know” and will follow up
- Self-awareness
- Importance of working as a team
- Honor relationships – don’t make anyone look bad
- No “gotchas”
- Apologize when needed
- Shift from campaigning to governing
- Collaboration, even when difficult
- All six elements work together
- One and three work together regarding team, honoring relationships

Why it Matters

The next part of the discussion was why it matters for the City Council to function well as a team? The City Manager commented on the following slide, noting that all of these points are important.

Why is an effective City Council team important?



Perceptions matter

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As pertaining to recruitment, senior-level people considering San Mateo (or any city) for a position will watch City Council meetings to see how staff is treated and the relationship on the dais, and they will ask others about how well the Council gets along. It is an important factor in an employment decision. A City Council's working relationship also impacts economic development because stability is a key ingredient in investment decisions. Councilmembers commented that they understand that perceptions matter.

The Differences Between Functional and Dysfunctional Governance

Jan then reviewed the differences between functional and dysfunctional governance. The following image highlights how Councils who choose to be intentional in how they work together can amplify the behaviors in the left-hand column and avoid the ones in the right-hand column.



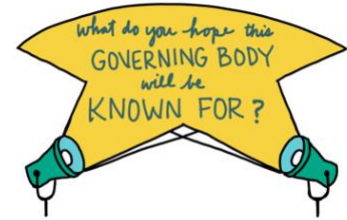
- Respect for the roles within the Council – Manager form of government
- After the vote, accept the outcome
- Disagree, but respectfully
- Engage the public in productive ways
- Doing what you say you will do and do it transparently – being trustworthy
- Considering all members of the public – not just those who speak
- Making unpopular but necessary decisions



- Trying to direct staff
- Personal attacks on colleagues, staff, or the public
- Dominating the discussion, lecturing colleagues
- Despite majority vote, speaking against the people who voted for it, or continuing to bring the issue up
- Stacking the audience
- Using social media to attack colleagues or staff
- Viewing colleagues or staff as enemies

What the Governing Body Wishes to be Known For and Its Values

Next, the Council and staff divided into groups of three to answer the question of what the governing body hopes it will be known for.



Hopes for Governing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being welcoming and fair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing equitable representation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveying a sense of stability and being stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honoring each other, and making this a city where people want to work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being good listeners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being collaborative and effective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to disagree agreeably 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being future focused to meet our future needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that the tone of the conversation reverberates, and being aware that those have impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a regional leader for innovation, practicing continuous improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being consensus builders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having political courage to do hard things
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being reflection of how our actions impact others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honoring traditions of the City
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being trustworthy with each other, staff, and the community 	

Our Values

The group then identified a few broad values that will help implement what the governing body wishes to be known for.

- Integrity
- Inclusion
- Sense of unity
- When one hurts, we all hurt; we share successes and pain

Establishing Our Council Code of Conduct

To introduce this section, Jan Perkins explained that every group has a set of norms. These may be explicit (written and adopted as a code of conduct) or implicit (informal but practiced). Norms are expected behaviors in a group. Through their behaviors, a group says what it believes in. By being explicit with expected behaviors, a group can bring out the best in each other and in the group and team as a whole.

The City of San Mateo has recently adopted an updated ***City Council and Boards and Commissions Rules and Procedures Manual***. Cities typically have such a manual, and a code of conduct is often part of the manual. The section that was deferred for action was Chapter 6 – Code of Conduct, pending the May 30, 2024, Council workshop. The Key Governance Principles (Chapter 3) were adopted with the balance of the Manual.

A suggested Code of Conduct was presented at the workshop for discussion. It differed from that included by staff in the original updated Manual. The suggested Code of Conduct incorporated concepts in the draft Manual, interviews with the Council in pre-workshop preparation, and best practices in developing norms for City Councils.

Through discussion during the workshop, the following Code of Conduct was agreed to by all members of Council. Staff also concurred with this Code.

The “comments” below reflected discussion points and are not part of the Code of Conduct.

Code of Conduct:

Councilmembers are committed to governing for all, and running our meetings with civility, decorum, and respect.

With that spirit, San Mateo Councilmembers shall:

A. Govern as a body. If we work together well as a team, our City will excel.

Comments: When we find common ground to move forward as a majority, we are demonstrating this. When there is “group think” or prolonged debate which does not move us forward, it can be problematic.

B. Treat all with dignity, courtesy, and respect. This includes staff, each other, or members of the public, on and off the dais.

Comments: This is shown by acknowledging comments made, maintaining order for effective meetings, asking direct questions. This is not shown by negative social media posts. It is impaired by statements by Councilmembers that are then followed with a question to staff, “is that correct?”

C. Keep confidential matters confidential.

Comments: Speaks for itself; agree.

D. Respect process and roles. This includes avoiding interruptions and distractions.

Comments: This means following procedures, being as concise as possible, and placing items strategically on the agenda for efficiency and ensuring the public can speak before it gets too late at night. This is impaired by meetings that go too late into the night, and this impacts public participation.

E. Agree to disagree in a respectful manner. We focus on the issue not the person.

Comments: We need to acknowledge both public and private conversations and their impacts.

F. Keep our comments clear, concise, and on-topic. This respects our colleagues', the public's, and staffs' time.

Comments: We do not all need to speak on every item. We should be asking questions ahead of the meeting and allow staff to review questions that may be asked at the meeting. Focus on issues and moving the item forward. We could have a separate handout of the questions to be decided on. It is ok for Councilmembers to interject respectfully, "can we call the question?" The Mayor's script could be augmented by asking staff if they have clarifications after the public speaks.

G. Give each other a chance to speak. Everyone gets to speak before another of us speaks for a second time. We refrain from dominating the discussion.

H. The Mayor normally speaks last. After other members of the Council have offered their opinions, the Mayor speaks. The Mayor can speak after each round of speaking by Councilmembers.

Comments: The Mayor speaks last to ensure that all have an opportunity to speak, and to help create consensus on an action. The Mayor can speak after each round, as he or she wishes.

I. Be mindful of the impact of our words and tone. We consider this as we address each other, staff, and the public.

Comments: Tone is as important as what is said. We can acknowledge the contributions of each other and staff as a positive way of speaking. We should avoid attacking a person for their comments or position.

J. Promote discussion and resolution. We present problems and issues in that way.

Comments: We can make sure all aspects are considered as we work toward resolution. We can stay focused.

K. Follow the agenda. We begin and end meetings on time.

Comments: We typically start on time, and if we need to continue meeting after 11 pm we take a vote to do so.

L. Respect the City Charter, rule of law, and decisions once made. We do not attempt to undermine decisions.

Comments: Once the Council votes, even when it is divided, that is the direction for staff.

M. Speak for the City only when specifically authorized.

Comments: Identify that you are speaking as a private citizen unless voted to represent the City; formal action needs to be taken in that case. The Manual provides rules for this.

N. Practice a "no surprise" rule. We give a heads up to Council colleagues, City Manager, and City Attorney out of respect and teamwork.

Comments: We can let the City Manager and our Council colleagues know if we hear that a group will be attending a Council meeting. We can keep the City Manager and City Attorney informed so they are not surprised.

O. Practice the principles of inclusivity and self-awareness to guard against implicit bias in our actions and decisions.

Comments: This is consistent with what we talk about and are working toward so adding this to our Code will be helpful.

P. Adhere to all conflict-of-interest laws.

Comments: State law requires this. Adding this to our Code of Conduct, as we have added other items above, indicates our commitment to this as a value.

Next Steps

The following steps were agreed to by each person in the group.

- Each member of Council, City Manager, and City Attorney commit to the Code of Conduct.
- Each person contributes to the “care and feeding” of the partnership.
- All members participate in regular training and professional development (Cal Cities, Institute for Local Government, others).
- Staff incorporates Code of Conduct into new Council orientation.

The suggestion was made by the facilitator that the Council conduct a check-in on how the Council is doing in carrying out its agreed upon Code of Conduct. The City Manager indicated that January 2025 is a likely schedule for this to occur.

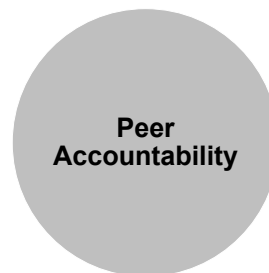
It was suggested that a copy of the Code of Conduct could be made visible in the Council Chambers, in the agenda or in other places as a reminder.

It was also noted that the City Clerk would be bringing back as part of the Consent Calendar the Code of Conduct as part of the *City Council and Boards and Commissions Rules and Procedures Manual* sometime this summer for formal adoption. It was further noted that since it applies to Boards and Commissions, those bodies would be provided training on the Code of Conduct and other elements of the updated Manual.

Accountability

Jan presented the following slide on peer accountability. *For the newly agreed upon Code of Conduct to be meaningful and useful, each person will need to contribute to its success.* The third element of this slide was specifically reviewed.

Each member of Council and the four staff present each stated how they would like their colleagues to approach them if they are regarded as being off track on one of their commitments to the Code of Conduct.



Everyone contributes equally to maintaining standards, meeting goals, and upholding shared values

Relies on mutual respect, trust, and a shared understanding of expectations within the group

If you got off track on one of your commitments, how would you like your colleagues to approach you?

Each person expressed a preference to being approached personally by their colleague about it, to have a conversation.

Bike Rack

This tool was used for time management purposes to note items to be discussed at another time. These two following items were added to the bike rack:

- Public comment placement and amount of time allocated on the Council agenda
- Commissions who do not agree with decisions made by Council and subsequent actions by those Commissions

Closing

As the workshop came to a close, each member of Council and staff shared one takeaway that was useful to them from spending a few hours with their colleagues. Responses included:

- Mutual respect in the room
- Helpful to hear what was important to Councilmembers
- Open communications
- Getting together
- Nice to have the entire team together
- Icebreaker
- Opportunity to reset our interactions and where we are
- Appreciate staff being with us to add their information
- Opportunity to open up

"The beginning is always today."
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Appendix: Agreed Upon Code of Conduct

Councilmembers are committed to governing for all, and running our meetings with civility, decorum, and respect.

With that spirit, San Mateo Councilmembers shall:

- A. Govern as a body.** If we work together well as a team, our city will excel.
- B. Treat all with dignity, courtesy, and respect.** This includes staff, each other, or members of the public on and off the dais.
- C. Keep confidential matters confidential.**
- D. Respect process and roles.** This includes avoiding interruptions and distractions.
- E. Agree to disagree in a respectful manner.** We focus on the issue not the person.
- F. Keep our comments clear, concise, and on-topic.** This respects our colleagues', the public's, and staffs' time.
- G. Give each other a chance to speak.** Everyone gets to speak before another of us speaks for a second time. We refrain from dominating the discussion.
- H. The Mayor normally speaks last.** After other members of the Council have offered their opinions, the Mayor speaks. The Mayor can speak after each round of speaking by Councilmembers.
- I. Be mindful of the impact of our words and tone.** We consider this as we address each other, staff, and the public.
- J. Promote discussion and resolution.** We present problems and issues in that way.
- K. Follow the agenda.** We begin and end meetings on time.
- L. Respect the City Charter, rule of law, and decisions once made.** We do not attempt to undermine decisions.
- M. Speak for the City only when specifically authorized.**
- N. Practice a “no surprise” rule.** We give a heads up to Council colleagues, City Manager, and City Attorney out of respect and teamwork.
- O. Practice the principles of inclusivity and self-awareness to guard against implicit bias in our actions and decisions.**
- P. Adhere to all conflict-of-interest laws.**