



Council Values and Norms: Check-in and Tune-up

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(Notes in red are the discussion “memory” from the meeting)

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Introduction

- The Council is a body that operates within several legal and practical parameters/realities – more about these in a moment
- These parameters mean that operating at highest effectiveness, individually and as a group, must be a priority
- To optimize your interactions, it's worthwhile to examine how you're coming together as a team in dealing with one another, the Manager/staff, and the community
 - Is there a set of values that can or do guide those interactions?
 - Has there been discussion and “buy-in” to those values, or have they been left unspoken?
 - How are those values playing out in action – in conduct?
- The “how” of those interactions can be as important as, and can either advance or impede, the “what” -- the content and substance of those interactions
 - With leadership comes the responsibility to manage both the “how” and the “what”

Introduction – Goals?

- How will we measure “success” in tonight’s discussion about how you’re interacting with one another, Manager/staff, community, and others? For me, any OR all of these would be great goals or achievements!
 - Hearing about what you’re doing successfully as well as any pain points that you’re feeling in your interactions
 - Voicing any concerns that you’ve felt but haven’t expressed about how those interactions are going
 - Identifying values that you can agree on for your interactions going forward
 - Identifying conduct that is or isn’t congruent with those values
 - Arming you with you values-based reasons for behaving/not behaving in certain ways in those interactions. Example – which of these works better:
 - “Would you please shut up already? You’ve repeated the same point five times in your half-hour filibuster, no one else can get a word in edgewise, and I’m sick of it!” OR
 - “One of our core values is to respect the limited time that we as individuals and as a body can devote to our important work. So, let’s avoid repeating points that have already been made, and give each member a fair opportunity to express their thoughts.”
 - Hearing that you would like to turn those values into a list of “norms” of conduct
 - Hearing that you might be interested in turning those “norms” into a more formal list or code of conduct, perhaps at a later date
 - Note: I’ve provided a framework for this discussion, but we can follow it...or not!
- **But more importantly, what are YOUR thoughts on what you’d like to achieve -- how to measure “success” -- in tonight’s discussion?**

Parameters and realities of office: agree or disagree?

- **As elected officials, your responsibilities are exercised as part of the body:**
 - This means governance is a *team activity*
 - Other than some specific responsibilities set forth for the Mayor, there's no room for "I" actions...**actions are in the collective "we"**
 - But it's also important to **respect the Mayor's role**, especially in meetings
 - Each member is a co-equal in the exercise of the Council's responsibilities – **"equality of power"**
 - Team members must have a level of **trust in one another**
 - Important to seek ways to build trust, not erode it
 - "We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions": give others the same presumption of good intentions that we give ourselves? Assume everyone here is acting in good faith, just as you are?

Parameters and realities of office: agree or disagree?

- **Charter establishes a council/manager, “governance-management” distinction**
 - City Manager format, §§2.06 & 3.07 “no interference” provisions
 - “Chain of command” is important in every organization
 - Staying “in lane” is crucial to avoid disempowerment/chaos/accountability loss in other parts of the organization, and is also a personal liability protection
- **Transparency for governing body actions is expected (and required by law)**
 - A lack of transparency undermines the public’s right to know about and participate in your decision-making process
 - It can also undermine equality of power on the Council

Parameters and realities of office: agree or disagree?

- **Related to transparency is the public's expectation of ACCESS to the Council and its members**
 - This access is a distinguishing highlight of municipal government!
 - But can implicate chain of command issues, quasi-judicial vs. legislative, governance vs. management/administration issues
- **Ethical standards are key to running a “clean” government**
 - Public credibility and trust depend on adherence to the letter and spirit of ethical standards
 - Your charter permits removal for ethics violations
- **You are citizen-officials and this is a part-time endeavor**
 - You juggle your Council work along with the rest of your life responsibilities – meaning there are limits to the time and energy you can devote to the Council
 - And there is always more work than time available!

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- **You are the CENTER OF THE MUNICIPAL UNIVERSE**
 - You have both actual and perceived powers
 - Perception management is thus a critical part of your role
 - **Appearances matter**
 - **Humane and courteous treatment** of one another, Manager/staff, citizens, and others who come before you is an important way to manage these powers
 - Once you're in office, there is NEVER a time when you can "remove your elected official hat" – the reality/perception is that you are an elected official EVERYWHERE and in EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE!
 - What you intend as a stray comment, joke, or question for information, may be received and perceived as harsh criticism, public humiliation, "gotcha moment" or a directive/order
 - **"Praise in public, criticize in private"**

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- **The Council's decisions are based on MAJORITY RULE**
 - Means that any given vote can appear to have “winners and losers”
 - But it's likely that no one person wins or loses all the time
 - **Respecting the “will of the majority”** thus becomes crucial – because you may “lose some” but you will also “win some”
 - Individual post-decision communications can undermine the majority's direction, or at the least, cause confusion and consternation about what that direction was!
 - Active and public undermining
 - Continually seeking to revisit a settled issue
 - Seeking to put your own “spin” on a decision or position by going to the Manager (or even more alarmingly, other staff members)
 - Majority rule, yes, but must governing necessarily be a “zero sum” game?
 - There's room to **listen** to each other, **compromise** towards a “**win-win**” solution, and to “**center the margins**” when appropriate

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- **As individuals, you have different learning styles and approaches, and you may not all be at the same spot on the “learning curve” of any given issue**
 - Accommodating those differences may be part of equality of information/equality of power
 - But also, assiduous “prep” is part of the job
 - As Council packets have moved from paper to PDF, the quantity of information has increased greatly
 - Veteran members might be able to share “tips” with newer members on how to digest and absorb all this info, short cuts, etc.
 - Sharing your thoughts with the Manager on how you’d like this information presented in packets and presentations, other communications styles and methods, could be helpful

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- Although the totality of your experience, background, and perspectives may have been key to your seeking/winning office, your role in office is as ultimate generalists
 - Specialized knowledge may be part of the “total package” you bring to decision-making, but the reality is that the City engages and uses specialists who bring knowledge TO you
 - Wielding specialized knowledge as a weapon can disrupt “equality of power” – bring the benefit of your knowledge in a way that doesn’t center you as “THE expert”
 - If you agree that “equality of power” is an important touchstone for the exercise of your responsibilities...does it also follow that “**equality of information**” is an essential supporting pillar for “equality of power”?

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- **Municipal government is nonpartisan**
 - A parameter, a reality, and a freedom!
 - Vote your mind and conscience, not a “platform”
 - No automatic “lining up” along party loyalties
 - No “assumptions” about you and your fellow members based on partisan expectations
 - Free to craft a solution that doesn’t have to fall neatly into expected outcomes

More parameters and realities: agree or disagree?

- **What other parameters and realities exist?**

Values expressed in your enactments and documents

- The City has a wealth of enactments and documents reflecting values that appear to be drivers for the community, the Council, and the Manager/staff
- There may be other values that each of you brings to your work with one another, Manager/staff, and the community that all (or most) of you can “co-sign”
- The parameters and realities we discussed may also reflect some values to add to the list
- So, let’s make a list!
- Note: the following are some of the values that seemed especially pertinent to our focus today, **Council interactions with one another, Manager/staff, community**
 - As we go through these, please think about whether you agree/disagree/place a high or not-high priority on them, so we can distill them down as you think right

Values?

- From your charter:
 - “We, not I” – Council powers; but also respect for Mayoral role
 - Highest ethical standards – removal for ethics violations
 - Transparency – open meetings, limited executive sessions
 - Inclusive – diverse viewpoints - array of boards and commissions
 - Respecting governance/administration “lanes” – “no interference” provisions
- From your comp plan:
 - Friendly, neighborly, fun
 - Collaborative, open-minded
 - Inclusive, diverse
- From your Code of Ethics:
 - Courtesy, fairness, impartiality, equality under the law
 - Public interest over private interest

Values? cont'd

- From your Council handbook:
 - Collective action and teamwork
 - Consider others' viewpoints, disagree respectfully
 - Respect and “speak with one voice” once the collective action is taken
 - Collaboration, search for shared points of agreement
 - Seek differing viewpoints, be comfortable in debate
 - Collective action and teamwork
 - Consider others' viewpoints, disagree respectfully
 - Respect and “speak with one voice” once the collective action is taken
 - Collaboration, search for shared points of agreement, respect majority rule
 - Seek differing viewpoints, be comfortable in debate
 - Pursue best solutions, not individual agendas
 - Provide/receive information in equal manner, operate from same “base” of information
 - Positive and welcoming

Values? cont'd

- From staff core values:
 - Fun – caring – positive approach and attitude
 - Respectful – tough on issues, easy on people
 - United as a team – work purposefully together – agree to disagree and move forward
 - Innovative – constructive feedback, continuous improvement
 - Transparent – trustworthy – assume positive intentions
 - Authentic – embrace differences – open minded-- honest
- And if you concurred with the “parameters and realities,” what additional values might be derived from those?
 - **We seek to understand one another’s viewpoints, especially when there isn’t agreement**
 - **We are open to changing our own perspective**
 - **We will ask questions and encourage questions**
 - **We believe in equality of power – information – time**
 - **We honor transparency as a core value**

Translating values into conduct expectations

- How do the values you've listed play out in terms of conduct you would want from yourself and other members? Conduct you would not want? Let's look at the values list, and create a list of potential conduct expectations.
 - Example: If you agree that respecting TIME as a limited resource is one of your values, how does that play out in your conduct?
 - "I would say it once and say it succinctly."
 - "I would allow comments to go around the room before coming back to my turn again."
 - "I would refrain from interrupting."
 - "I would allow the Mayor to direct 'traffic' during Council discussions."

Translating values into conduct expectations

- **We will arrive with best intentions, and presume best intentions of others**
- **We will ensure everyone has the opportunity to have a say , uninterrupted, before debate commences**
- **We will listen to understand, and not just listen to respond**
- **We will wait to commit to a position until after we've had the opportunity to hear others' views**
- **We will respect the Mayor's "traffic direction" role**
- **We will maintain a sense of flexibility**
- **We will praise in public, criticize in private**
- **We will search for points of agreement**
- **We will be tough on the issues, but not on each other**
- **We will manage our tone and body language when communicating**
- **We will not make assumptions about one another's views – we will seek to understand and clarify differences of opinion**

Translating values into conduct expectations

- **We will look for points of compromise**
- **We will respect one another and the staff, our limited time resources, our varying learning styles**
- **We will respect equality of power in our discussions by not interrupting and by listening intentionally**
- **We will speak with one voice after a decision has been reached, respect the will of the majority, and continue to be constructive even if we were a dissenting vote/voice**
- **We understand the importance of perception management, given that our roles carry actual as well as perceived powers**
- **We will respect the chain of command with the understanding that this respect must flow both ways**
- **We will seek to “keep it positive”**

Translating values into conduct expectations

- How can the Manager and staff SUPPORT your values? Let's make a list of supporting conduct expectations.
 - Example: When one member requests information, the Manager will copy the other members, so everyone has the same information.
 - Example: When a member "hands off" a citizen inquiry to the Manager, the Manager will circle back to let the member know that the inquiry has been addressed, so that citizen access can be honored while maintaining governance/management lanes.

Where do we go from here?

- Where are we in terms of our goals and measures of success for this discussion?
- “Shape up” values list into a concise and coherent format, and bring back?
- “Clean up” list of conduct expectations/norms for Council, Manager/staff, and bring back?
- **Ponder, possibly for a future meeting:**
 - **Whether these expectations and norms could be incorporated into a more formal “Code of Conduct,” or they’re fine if left in a less formal iteration?**
 - How we “model” these values and norms so they become part of the prevailing culture inside and outside the Council chambers, and how do we hold ourselves accountable around them?
 - How we communicate these values and norms?

Conclusion

- THANK YOU for your service in municipal government, and in making Fruita an EXCEPTIONAL community!
- THANK YOU for the opportunity to have this discussion with you.
- Happy to follow up for additional work

About CIRSA

Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency

- Public entity self-insurance pool for property, liability, and workers' compensation coverages
- Formed by in 1982 by 18 municipalities pursuant to CML study committee recommendations
- Not an insurance company, but an entity created by IGA of our members
- Governed by 7-member board made up of municipal officials
- Total membership today stands at 283 member entities encompassing over 80 percent of Colorado's municipalities
- Elected official resources: <https://www.cirsa.org/safety-training/elected-officials/>

Speaker Bio

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- Executive Director for CIRSA; previously General Counsel/Deputy Executive Director
- Previously in private practice with the firm of Griffiths, Tanoue, Light, Harrington & Dawes, serving CIRSA as its contract General Counsel for 12 years, and serving as City or Town Attorney for several Colorado municipalities
- Previously Staff Attorney for the Colorado Municipal League, representing the collective interests of Colorado municipalities
- Regular speaker on local government liability topics; author of several publications on liability issues