

**CITY OF LAKE CITY, FL
CITY MANAGER**

REFERENCES FOR THOMAS THOMAS

Reference Name: How long and in what capacity have you known Thomas Thomas?

Matt Pappas, Attorney, City of Rock Island, IL

I knew him as the attorney for the City of Rock Island.

Robert Reichert, Mayor, Macon-Bibb County Government, GA

I hired him when I was elected Mayor of Macon in 2008. I hired him to be the Chief Administrative Officer in my office. He served in that capacity until 2011. He left us to take a position in Illinois because his daughter had gone to school up there.

Bryan Myrkle, Community Development Director, City of Charlotte, MI

He came here as an interim. The last manager left unexpectedly. Thomas was living in Chicago at the time, so it was convenient for him to serve as an interim.

Dennis Pauley, Mayor (Former), City of Rock Island, IL

I was the Mayor of Rock Island during the entire time he was the City Manager.

Frank Kelty, Mayor (Former), City of Unalaska, AK

He was the Unalaska City Manager a few years ago, and I was the mayor there.

How would you characterize Mr. Thomas' management style?

He was very open in listening to everyone, taking time, not reacting to things, or making snap judgments. He brought a great deal of perspective to the job, from as far south as Georgia all the way to Alaska. We are a rural mid-Michigan community, not cosmopolitan, so he wasn't limited to towns similar to us. His varied background gave us some great perspectives. He didn't have blinders on because he's been around and seen and done a lot.

I reported directly to him. There were challenging things when he came in. Some things going on were from the last manager getting upset about things between the Fire Department and other departments, and the former manager didn't want to manage the situation. So he left it to Mr. Thomas to try and solve. It was a very difficult situation. Fire has political weight they throw around. He wasn't intimidated or emotional about it. It was a difficult time. Also, it was around the time of COVID lockdowns, so there was some added tension that wouldn't otherwise be going on. It was a relatively difficult situation. The issue never really got resolved, but, with Thomas' guidance, the Council did make some headway and spun the Fire Department off to a special assessment unit. What Thomas did was very important to this community. He outlined the problem in ways that enabled the Council, Fire Department, and the community to see it clearly. He said it will not go away, so don't brush it under the rug, and we can't cut other departments' funding to keep Fire going. He showed the community and the Council that it was a serious problem. It's not made up. He got us pointed that way. Once they realized it was going to be a significant change, he ripped the band aid off. He opened the door.

I liked working for him. He has a good personality, kind of funny, easy to talk to, has an open-door policy, and can talk about whatever is needed. He took you seriously and didn't get caught up in office politics either. One thing is that Mr. Thomas is African American, and we are the most "white" city in Michigan. That could have gone in any direction because we never had a black employee let alone a manager. It was never an issue with him being here.

He was a good manager. He was not overly aggressive or too demanding on the people. The mayor is a ceremonial position, so I was not at City Hall all the time. We worked together well. The City Manager was the only employee for the Mayor and City Council. Our working relationship was very good. He was very attentive to the directives that Council gave to him. His management style was very good. He would hire people and let them do their job and just get involved if he had to.

He expects a lot from people, and he wants them to produce. He was thorough and well documented. Thomas preferred to have email/text conversations with people, so that he would have a record of who said what. Not for a he said she said, but to be thorough. He would message department heads for reports and updates. He also implemented an evaluation process because we did not have a good one. It included everyone from the top, all the way down. If you were charged with the responsibility of overseeing or managing people, then you were also supposed to give a report on a periodic basis of how things were moving along.

How are his interpersonal skills?

I thought his communication skills were good. He was quick to get people together rather than being a middleman. He believed in getting everyone in the same room—he got us together and cut to the chase rather than endlessly analyzing things. He was discreet and diplomatic—not pushy. Normally you would expect a city manager to go to rotary and such, but he did not get the opportunity to do that too much here because of COVID. He was an interim, so we didn't have a lot of time to get to know him better.

His skills of working with the Mayor and Council were very good. His Directors and staff were a little diverse and different. He had a couple of Directors who particularly like his management style, but most of the Directors supported him and really liked working for him. He was in a sticky situation because he got the job over the acting City Manager that was now still an employee under him. Some of the Directors were loyal to her, and it created some challenges.

I found him very easy to get along with. You could talk to him; he is very approachable. He wouldn't just give you the answers you were looking for but he would be very responsive. He would give you the answer, whether you wanted to hear it or not. He would give it to you.

They are good for his position as a City Manager.

They are ok. He does like to document things, which is fine. But sometimes you just want to sit down and chat on an informal basis.

He is being considered for a City Manager. What can you tell me about his experience and knowledge as it relates to this type of position?

It seemed that he had a lot of experience and specific experience that could be applied from where he had been before. Even not having worked in Michigan a lot, he understood legal obligations and policies and procedures.

He would do well. He is very knowledgeable. He has been in the city administrator business for a long time, and he had good references when we hired him. We are in the middle of the Bering Sea, in a very, very remote location. It is a different environment for anyone coming from the lower 48. I don't know how his family adjusted to the community, but I know that he would do fine for you.

He was the City Manager of Rock Island, and in that capacity, he had to oversee all the departments and handle the budget. I think he would be very qualified for this position.

He was given a long leash to do whatever he wanted to do in the city, and he did a good job.

He was always very thorough, and he was very conscientious of managing money properly. We were hard pressed for money in 2008, and he was a good money manager. He was conscientious of costs, revenues, expenses, etc.; he was very good at that.

How does he relate with his direct supervisor and elected officials?

That is a little more of a mystery to me. We weren't having in-person meetings at the time he was here because of COVID. I saw him interact with staff more than Council. It was a temporary thing, so he often asked Department Heads to present. He was content to let Department Heads speak for themselves and represent their Departments. Managers are different in that regard. I liked that he gave us a free hand. I never heard anything that would give me pause about him.

He relates very well. He was very attentive to the directives that we gave him. He worked on them to the best of his abilities under difficult circumstances. I had a great relationship with him.

We talked almost every day about the projects that were coming up. He would update the Council on whatever was coming up, and if he didn't have all of the information they wanted, he would get it for them. He kept us very well informed.

I think there was some strain sometimes because he handled things professionally. Frankly, some of the elected weren't used to and didn't like that.

No concerns there at all. We got along well.

How does he relate with other Department Heads and peers?

He did fine. He organized meetings and moderated some frank discussions on some significant issues at the time. We had a lot of people quit or retire during COVID. We had people trying to pick up the slack for other people and some issues that pitted some Departments against others. He didn't get caught up in that. I would give him the highest praise in this area.

Most of them had a great working relationship with him. Some of them were not on board because they supported the former acting manager.

I did not see a problem with any of that anywhere. We had constant meetings with other areas, since we are part of the quad cities, and he often met with other city administrators and managers.

I think he did well, but he had a lot of high expectations of people.

He was very good at documenting performance, performance reviews, and staff reports. He was very thorough with that. Sometimes that would chaff some department heads to be required to submit these written reports. But he was always felt that the reports needed to be kept. He did not think it was appropriate at all to socialize with anyone that he supervised. So, he never developed close interpersonal relationships with them. He kept it professional.

How does he relate with the public and the media?

I did not see him have any interaction with the media. We have non-controversial media types here.

He did well. He got out in the community, went to school events, Lions Club meetings, and attended community events.

He was very approachable, and the public would approach him whenever he was out and about. The media was very active, and they were contacting us constantly whenever there was something out there.

He was hands-off primarily due to COVID.

He didn't think it was his place to make public appearances. He did not want to go out and make speeches or talks because our mayor liked doing that, and his job as the CAO was the nuts and bolts, performance, budget, time schedules, etc. So, he did not make a lot of presentations to groups but I have no concerns that he could do that.

What would you say are Mr. Thomas' significant accomplishments?

We got approval for a redevelopment of a historic building downtown. It was dangerously dilapidated and was going to be condemned. We got a deal together to get a developer to look at it. I thought it was going to be tough to get lower-income housing in there. He convinced the city council to get that moved along. We did approve the local tax abatement, and then some incentives from the state didn't come through. His outside perspective is valuable. I've worked here a long time. It's good when someone has that experience. I do economic development here, so that was something I was involved in with him. Also, the fact he kept the ship afloat while things were going on.

He was not here that long. A lot of the projects were ongoing when he got here. The port facility was a big project that was finished under his watch, and that was a \$50 million expansion to the City's Port facility for container ships. That was a big project that he came through very well. We have been planning on an \$80 million road project that still hasn't moved forward, but he helped get the word out about it to D.C. He was also involved in separating the Fire Department from the Police Department. Previously the Police oversaw Fire, and it led to some problems. Those were some of the big things he worked on--the separation of those. Now Fire is not having to answer to the Police all of the time. It has turned out to be a great thing.

He had a tough road to handle at first. He came after a city manager that had been there for 22 years. He did a very good job of overcoming that challenge. He did an exceptional job with our budget, seeing that we were a little oversized and cutting it back. He helped Departments do with what they had instead of adding more. We didn't have to raise taxes for six years because of the way he managed the budget.

His accomplishments were to get a disenfranchised Board back to feeling like they had control and able to effectively move forward.

He got us through a very difficult period financially. I became the Mayor in 2007 just before the fall of the economy. We had to do lay-offs six to nine months into my first year as Mayor. We also had a tornado come through that first year. But he helped us get through those times. He is thorough, and he helped us stay in our budget.

Please tell me about anything that Mr. Thomas could improve upon. Are there any areas where he might not have a strong skill set or might not have had as much exposure to? What are his weaknesses?

I don't have any criticisms or anything like that.

If anything, just be a little bit visible and more available for the public if that's what the City wants.

Not that I can think of.

Maybe making presentations publicly and handling press because that was the role of the Mayor..

In the area of interpersonal skills, that was just a choice he made to document and request reports a lot. I guess if he softened up in that area, that might pay big dividends for him.

We will be conducting a very thorough search of newspaper articles as well as a Google search on Mr. Thomas. To your knowledge is there anything out there whether true or not that warrants an explanation? Anything that would embarrass our client?

I'm not aware of any skeletons in the closet at all.

The only thing that people had an issue with was Walmart pulling out of a contract with us. It had nothing to do with him though.

I do not know.

No, not really.

Not that I can think of.

This may be conjecture on your part, but why do you think he's looking to make a career change?

In the end here, he threw his hat in the ring here, but by then, he had told enough people that he wasn't going to do it because he was far away from family and wanted to go back south, etc. They settled on a favorite by the time he expressed interest. I think they made a good decision. He left under good terms, and there are no negatives from what I've heard.

He resigned. There were conflicts with a couple of his Directors, because they wanted the internal to get the job and now she reported to Thomas and they were not happy about it. But he had a good relationship with the majority of them. However, there were just those few that were buddy-buddy with the individual that did not get the job.

I know he has moved from time to time, by his choice for better positions and bigger communities. So, nothing beyond that.

I really don't know. I think he's in the market and looking for his next stop.

No, I really don't know. I think he likes the profession and is good at it.