

City of Whittier
City Attorney Performance Evaluation Summary

City Attorney: Holly Wells, Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot

Evaluation Period: November 2025 – June 2026

Prepared By: City Clerk's Office

The purpose of this document is to provide the City Council with a summary of anonymous survey responses received for the City Attorney's performance review for the November 2025 through June 2026 rating period. The results are provided to assist the Council in conducting the City Attorney's performance review during an open public meeting.

The City Clerk's Office has compiled the survey responses for readability and does not make findings, recommendations, or conclusions regarding the City Attorney's performance.

Responses Received

Two surveys were circulated for this rating period: one for members of the City Council and one for staff. Five anonymous Council responses were received. One anonymous staff response was received.

Council survey results are presented as the primary evaluation data because the Council is the evaluating body. Staff feedback is noted separately as supplemental context.

Evaluation Category	Average (0 – 5)	Responses
Legal Competence & Advice	4.0	5
Ethics & Professional Conduct	3.8	5
Policy & Legislative Support	4.4	5
Council & Staff Relations	3.8	5
Litigation & Risk Management	4.2	5
Counsel Coordination	4.0	5
Responsiveness & Communication	4.0	5
Strategic Counsel & Problem Solving	4.0	5

Overall Performance Rating	Responses
Exceeds Expectations	4
Needs Improvement	1

Comment Topics Reflected in Council Responses

The following topics appeared in written council responses. These are provided as a neutral organization of comments for readability and are not findings or conclusions of the City Clerk's Office.

1. Areas Noted Positively by Respondents

Several respondents expressed appreciation for the City Attorney's professionalism, legal knowledge, availability, and support on significant City matters. Examples include:

"Seems extremely competent."

"Always professional."

"Always calls back!"

"City Attorney has given council confidence in issues that arise. Having faith in their legal guidance allows us to make the right decisions moving forward."

"Approval for purchase of railroad lands. Very big accomplishment."

2. Requests for More Concise or Definitive Guidance

Multiple respondents commented on the desire for more concise or definitive legal guidance when complex matters are presented to the Council. Representative comments included:

"Shorter answers to the many questions presented by Council and administration."

"Sometimes, a definitive answer would be more helpful in making decisions when there is a pending vote."

"I would like the City Attorney to provide more direct, concise advice and focus on recommending specific, actionable solutions."

"The City Attorney frequently complicates matters by providing overly long-winded and convoluted responses."

3. Neutrality, Access, and Role Clarity

Some respondents commented on the attorney's role in serving the Council as a whole and maintaining visible neutrality. Examples included:

"There are times I felt legal was representing the City Manager, more than the city or the people."

"I would like to see a more steadfast commitment to providing impartial, independent legal counsel."

"The City Attorney prioritize engaging with the City Council as a cohesive legislative body rather than deferring to individual members."

4. Responsiveness and Follow-Up

Responses reflected both positive and negative experiences regarding responsiveness.

Positive comments included:

"Makes herself available."

"Thanks for always calling me back promptly."

Other comments requested improved follow-up:

"Sent an email about... and my potential conflict of interest and got crickets."

"I experienced a delay in receiving a response to a request for legal assistance."

5. Council Education, Legal Boundaries, and Governance Support

Some respondents expressed appreciation for the City Attorney's role in assisting Council with legal compliance, governance issues, and understanding the limits of Council authority.

"Very thorough on compliance with law and interpretation of same."

"Thank you for stopping council members when we are going out of bounds."

"Additional training and education for council members. More and back pressure on council if we are pushing the bounds."

Supplemental Staff Feedback

At the request of the City Manager, a survey was distributed to staff. One anonymous response was received. Because only one response was received, the comments below should not be interpreted as representing the views of City staff generally and are provided solely as supplemental information for Council consideration.

The staff respondent noted:

Positive observations

"The successful facilitation of the land purchase from the railroad stands out as a significant accomplishment that provided tangible value to the City."

"The City Attorney consistently provides accurate and professional legal guidance that meets expectations."

Suggested areas for improvement

"I would appreciate more definitive guidance on complex issues."

"Providing clearer, more decisive recommendations would significantly assist the council in decision-making processes."

"Some response times can take more time than expected."