Eight Expectations for Effective City Councils

Expectation 1: The Council Sets Direction by

- Determining the local government’s mission and purpose
- Setting future direction and policy—the city manager is responsible for administrative functions and city operations
- Regularly engaging in strategy development
- Approving plans for the efficient and effective administration of city affairs

Expectation 2: The Council Acts as a Body by

- Focusing its discussion using clear and consistent rules of procedure, follows a planned agenda and spends time on important topics
- Understanding its own and the city’s legal responsibilities
- Making sure all city council members have the same information with which to make decisions
- Working to master small-group decision making techniques
- Respecting each other and abiding by the decisions of the city council

Expectation 3: The Council Serves Citizens Well by

- Enhancing the city’s public image
- Providing citizens opportunities to respectfully comment on public issues
- Ensuring the success and viability of the community by convening and facilitating citizen engagement
- Making sure that resources are adequate to serve the public and that resources are used for their intended purposes

Expectation 4: The Council Respects the Role of the Manager as Chief Administrator for the City by

- Channeling communications appropriately to the city manager
- Depending upon employees to respond to citizen concerns and complaints as fully and as expeditiously as practical
- Expecting staff to make independent and objective recommendations
- Expecting the manager and staff to support and advocate for adopted council policy
- Respecting the professionals who work in local government and follow appropriate protocols for interacting with staff
- Refraining from publicly criticizing an individual employee. Criticism is differentiated from questioning facts or the opinion of staff

Expectation 5: The Council is Responsible for Council Members Behaviors by

- Abstaining from seeking political support from staff
- Submitting questions about council agenda items ahead of the meeting
● Providing each member an opportunity to influence and respectfully dissent in board meetings
● Focusing on issues, not personalities
● Having the mayor and/or members of the governing board take responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior among members of the council themselves. They do not delegate this responsibility to the manager
● Working as a team to jointly develop and hold themselves accountable to a common code of conduct

Expectation 6: The Council Gives the Manager a Chance to Prove Him/Herself by

● Recruiting, selecting and hiring the city manager
● Promoting and encouraging a positive relationship between the council and the manager
● Treating and respecting the manager as a professional
● Recognizing the role of professional managers is to serve the council as a whole

Expectation 7: The Council Freely Gives and Seeks Feedback

● Supporting the manager by providing clear direction and annually reviewing her or his performance
● Annually setting expectations for itself and assessing its own performance
● Inviting constructive feedback to improve its own performance
● Regularly reviewing and monitoring the city’s finances, programs and services

Expectation 8: The Council Works with the Manager to Be a High Performing Governing Body by

● Looking to the manager to assist them in:
  1. Clearly defining roles and relationships
  2. Thinking to the future and acting strategically on key issues
  3. Operating in a culture of values and ethics
  4. Regularly evaluating policy implementation
  5. Developing and following protocols for council behavior and council-staff relations
  6. Allocating time and energy appropriately
  7. Setting clear rules and procedures for meetings
  8. Getting regular assessments of citizen concerns and council performance
  9. Recognizing the council’s position in intergovernmental systems and in building productive partnerships
  10. Focusing on personal learning and developing as leaders
● Having the mayor and manager orients new members to the governing board, providing expectations about how to be successful
● Working with the manager to behave in a manner that encourages citizen confidence in local government