

# City of Charlottesville

*THE BEST PLACE TO LIVE IN AMERICA*

## **Council – Manager Relationships @ ICMA San Antonio Conference Presentation**

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### ***OF OVERALL IMPORTANCE:***

Trust, relationship building, communications and a shared Vision for making a positive difference in the community.

- \* Relationship Building – probably from my 31 years this the most important – if you don't do it well or at least make a very sincere effort, you will lose as City Manager the opportunity to get to the big issues, or when the issues get tough it will be harder going. Build it early on.
- \* Listen intently and intensely
- \* Patience – timing critical
- \* Behind the scenes works better than being very out front
- \* Ask and understand why a Councilor “in the seat”, understand the motivation and what would be seen as success from their perspective
- \* Humility yet self confident versus arrogance and egotistical
- \* Change leadership – seeing versus acting
- \* Often Council can get “stuck” at the pothole levels – techniques to think big picture or to at least do both at once
- \* Full time staff – part time City Councilors; they are your #1 relationship, but your are not their #1 relationship
- \* Individual or neighborhood versus community wide interests and Council reactions
- \* No surprises – don't let Council read about it in the newspaper
- \* Success individually, success as a Council group (or at least the majority) leads to the success of the City Manager
- \* Never let your ego be bigger than Council's
- \* Give Council the public credit for the successes – step back; step up front in a crisis or disaster
- \* Stay out of individual Council disagreements or Council “politics,” you will lose at that game!
- \* Be absolutely honest and of the highest integrity
- \* Know the “personal interests” (city related) of each Councilor – talk about it – talk directly about them
- \* Always take the “high road” – be professional – the more public it is, the more important to be extremel professional
- \* Always treat Council with respect – they are the bosses
- \* You “serve” the community, but never lose sight that if you don't serve the Council well, you won't be around to serve the community



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- \* Be disciplined in your follow up on Council issues, track them to completion; have a system that works to assure closure
- \* Pay attention to Council details – can build trust that leads to bigger, more strategic issues
- \* Lead – you have an organization full of managers to motivate – but you play the community leadership role in the broadest sense
- \* Have regular one on one meetings with Councilors – as much time as you can get
- \* Dealing with difficult Council members can become an energy draining event; some strategies
- \* Focus on the positives – if you allow it, you can become a “magnet” for the negative naysayers (on Council, or in the community)
- \* How one negative voice on Council can impact the whole group?
- \* Give Council policy alternatives that are thoughtful and well researched and doable, yet give a good strong recommendation they can act upon
- \* Use community process to build consensus on major issues, prior to getting onto the Council agenda – don’t surprise the community, much less the Council
- \* Evolving email world, much more so than the use of telephones (which was the predominant communication 10 years ago, etc.), yet the real need for face to face meetings
- \* Different Council styles – city “work” time, communications styles – talk about it upfront with new Councilors
- \* The value of a formal, written agreement – severance - to give you as a City Manager permission to take risks (but not risk your personal finances or family) and to be entrepreneurial
- \* Get agreement from Council that family special events come first
- \* Enjoy the moment in the context of the long term (you’re paid to lead)
- \* Council reacts differently as a group in public than what you see/hear in private; expect that
- \* Anticipate (lead) – you’re in trouble if you’re merely reacting
- \* “Drive” excellence
- \* Get personally “out” in the community every day – be highly visible (but don’t overshadow the Council in doing). E.g. Community meetings, meet and greets, neighborhood walks, living room meetings, etc.
- \* Good Councilors in my view (at least those who have community roots) will almost always hear things in the community about issues (or even city hall people issues) that you don’t – be positive with that and use it as “radar reconnaissance” (rather than being defensive about how they heard such and such)
- \* Council “building” – your job, whether they let you do it or not – value of good retreats, work sessions, issues building, etc.
- \* The Mayor plays a special role (even if council appointed), recognize that and build on that – means a special, very trusting relationship for the City Manager

