

**City of Mountain View
City Council Interviews
January 2017**

The summary below is based on interviews that were conducted in January 2017 by Shawn Spano, Communication Consultant with (in alphabetical order): Margaret Abe-Koga, Chris Clark, Lisa Matichak, John McAlister, Ken Rosenberg, Pat Showalter and Lenny Siegel.

The summary is organized into three sections, roughly corresponding to the questions that were asked in the interviews. Key points that emerged in response to the questions are included in the form of summary statements, paraphrases, and direct quotes.

Section One: Learning about individual Council Members

1. What inspired you to become involved in public service? What do you want to achieve in the next two years?

There were a variety of factors discussed, with more overlap and similarities than differences.

- All of you said that your experience doing community service work in Mountain View was a key factor in shaping your decision to run for Council. That work includes serving on Planning Commission, being a Board member for non-profit organizations, serving on different community groups and organizations, and developing community projects and programs. All of you were deeply engaged in the community in one way or another before you ran for Council.
- All of you said you are committed to serving the community – “I want to help my community and have an impact” – and that you enjoy being part of the process and having a hand in shaping the future of the City.
- Some of you first thought about running for Council because others approached you and encouraged you to run. There wasn’t a particular issue or problem that you were focused on.
- Others decided to run because you felt that particular issues needed to be addressed (e.g. ABAG, North Bayshore Housing, a neighborhood development project, etc.), and that your background and experience made you well suited to tackle those issues.
- Some of you are focused on specific projects you want to address in the next few years, such as implementing the rent control charter amendment, complete planning for North Bayshore Housing, and developing a regional mass transit system.
- Others are focused more on broader issue areas, such as housing, transportation sustainability, land use, neighborhoods, quality of life and regionalism.

2. How have you or will you approach your work as a Council member? That is, how do you go about gathering and absorbing information? What is your approach to decision making?

The responses here show that there are many similarities in how you all approach your work as Council members, along with some minor differences or points of emphasis.

- All of you said that reading is a primary way you receive information, including staff reports and other packet materials, original research reports, traditional media and social media.
- All of you said you also gather information by talking with and listening to individual community members, community groups, and staff, preferring to meet with a variety of people on all sides of an issue or project, including both constituents and developers – “I will meet with anybody.”
- Some of you are analytical and data driven. Others are more inclined to draw on gut-level feelings. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive, more a matter of what gets emphasized based on the nature of the issue and individual knowledge and experience with the issue.

3. Overall, what do you think makes an effective City Council member?

While there was a range of answers to this question, there was little or no disagreement among them.

- Comes to meetings prepared; reads the packet; asks staff questions in advance
- Open to a variety of viewpoints; able to absorb and consider new information and ideas
- States their views clearly, and listens to others; tries to understand their perspective
- Is respectful; challenges ideas, not people
- Thoughtful, smart and intelligent
- Engages in “efficient speaking;” avoids long speeches and excessive talking – “It’s OK to pass or to say you agree with what’s already been said”
- Engages with and is respectful of community members; listens to understand their concerns and asks for their ideas and solutions
- Knows City staff and the different departments
- Is accessible
- Collaborates effectively with elected officials from other jurisdictions
- Is amiable and cooperative; willing to compromise
- Has strong principles and clear goals and values, but is flexible and open to new ideas
- Provides background information and context for their positions and decisions; explains their thought and reasoning process
- Can move forward after a vote is taken without regret or animosity
- Balances being objective and empathic
- Does not miss meetings regularly

Section Two: How Should Council Communicate and Work Together

While there was a range of answers to the following questions, there is agreement on most items with a few notable differences.

4. *What principles, norms, and behaviors should guide communication between Council members? That is, how should you and your Council colleagues communicate with each other?*
- Encourage informal, face-to-face conversations between Council members, as long as they are in compliance with the Brown Act.
 - Engage in open and honest dialogue – speak candidly and listen openly
 - Address differences respectfully and constructively
 - Concentrate on issues, not personalities
 - Seek to understand each other’s concerns, issues and perspectives
 - Create trust and build good working relationships
 - Be able to move forward after decisions are made
 - Find areas of common ground and agreement
 - Be respectful of each other’s time
 - Should Council members defer to the mayor on press requests? [Check this at team-building session]
5. *What do you see as ineffective communication between Council members? That is, what sorts of communication behaviors should you and your Council colleagues avoid?*
- Making disparaging remarks or personal attacks
 - Talking too much without getting to the point; “hogging all the air time”
 - Forming cliques and factions that are exclusionary
 - Going to the media or interest groups after a decision has been made to undermine the vote and generate opposition
 - Talking with the media and others about confidential matters
 - Trafficking in gossip and innuendo
 - Changing positions in inconsistent and random ways
 - Taking things personally; making it personal
 - Being short with each other; interrupting; not listening; not letting others finish
6. *How should you and your Council colleagues handle (1) policy and (2) style differences?*
- Policy differences: Vote and then move on
 - Policy differences: Express your views honestly, provide background and context, vote, and then move forward
 - Policy differences: Listen carefully to understand each other’s perspectives
 - Style differences: Accept them and adapt to them
 - Style differences: Be excruciatingly polite to each other
 - Style differences: Gently point out ineffective behavior off line in a private conversation
 - Style differences: Use humor, appropriately, to draw attention to style differences
7. *What do you think makes for an effective Council meeting? What do you encourage you and your colleagues to do? What do you want to avoid at Council meetings?*

- Concise and efficient speaking (i.e. brief statements instead of monologues), balanced with the need for Council members to “have their say”
- Council members come prepared for meetings
- Meetings end in a reasonable amount of time
- Council talks to each other, not just the public or staff; makes eye contact
- Compromises that make everybody happy or at least satisfied
- Council members stay on task and on time, allowing Council to get through the agenda without having excessively long meetings
- Avoid “getting stuck,” going in circles or having to come back to issues unnecessarily; defer items only if absolutely needed
- Avoid major surprises on the dais, as much as possible
- We regularly have dinner together before meetings.
- How can we have more free flowing discussion in light of the technology in Council Chambers that creates a structured speaker’s list? [Check this at teambuilding]
- How can we better manage time at meetings, like having a timer for Council comments? [Check this at teambuilding]
- Is there a way to gauge the public’s preferences at Council meetings without everybody having to speak at the microphone? [Check this at teambuilding]
- Is there a way to answer the public’s questions during public comment/oral communication? [Check this at teambuilding]

Section Three: Council Communication with Staff

8. *How should you and your Council colleagues communicate with staff? What principles, norms, and behaviors should guide these kinds of interaction?*

There was quite a bit of agreement among Council on communication with staff.

- Work through the City Manager when communicating with staff, in line with the Council Code of Conduct and the Council-Manager form of government. What are the rules of engagement for Council – staff interactions? Who, can talk to who, when, under what circumstances, etc.? [Check this at teambuilding]
- When possible, ask staff your questions before Council meetings; avoid surprising staff at meetings
- Develop good working relationships with staff; avoid chastising, scolding, or embarrassing staff in public, whether overt or subtle
- Trust and value staff’s input and knowledge
- Expect staff to be transparent and straightforward in their analyses and recommendations
- Overall, Council said that their working relationships with staff are “going well,” and that “there are no problems”