

# City of Des Moines

## 2021 City Manager Performance Review

### Overview:

You are being provided with this form and are asked to complete it according to your honest evaluation of the City Manager's performance.

At the core, effective performance reviews are primarily about meaningful communication. It is essential that the Mayor and Council communicate clearly and unambiguously regarding areas of performance which are functioning well, and areas where performance improvement is possible. But it is also critical for the team to acknowledge the difficult situation a manager is in when the Mayor and Council have differing views on what they expect of the manager.

This evaluation form is designed to accomplish both of those objectives, and then to serve as a foundation for meaningful, honest and open communication as a team.

### Instructions for Completing the Form:

1. Each Councilmember should answer each of the following items as honestly and objectively as possible, remembering that the role of the city manager is to follow the direction of the entire council, not that of individual council members.
2. Put your name on the review form since this process is designed to communicate each of the Council members varying Council desires and expectations to assist in achieving the above mentioned goals.
3. For the section on **Leadership and Management**, please **HIGHLIGHT** in yellow the descriptor which you believe best describes the city manager's performance on that particular characteristic.
  - a. On any item you score as "Poor" or "Unacceptable", please provide specific comments regarding why you have scored that item the way you have. If you cannot describe why you believe improvement is needed and how, then you cannot reasonably expect improvement to occur.
4. For the section on **New Objectives**, please list any new objectives you would like for the Council to consider establishing for the City Manager. Please remember that individual council members cannot establish objectives for the City Manager, only the City Council as a body can do so.
5. For the section on **Other Weaknesses** please provide specific details on particular areas in which you would like to see improvement.

- a. On any item you list as “Other Weaknesses”, please provide specific comments regarding why you have listed that item and the specific changes you would like to see. If you cannot describe why you believe improvement is needed and how, then you cannot reasonably expect improvement to occur.
6. For the section on **Other Strengths** please provide insight into any areas in which you feel the City Manager has demonstrated strength that is not otherwise discussed on this form.
7. Once you have completed the form, please email it back to the City Attorney.
8. The City Attorney will provide all completed evaluation forms to the Mayor who will prepare a composite evaluation form that reflects the individual scores of each Council member on a single combined form using a color coded key of how each Council member scored each item to facilitate optimal understanding and meaningful discussion. Each Council Member and the City Manager will all receive a copy of the composite form at the evaluation workshop to facilitate and guide the discussion.
9. If you do not have a response for a specific area, you may simply type “N/A” in the answer.
10. The composite form will utilize color coding according to the following key:

KEY: TBD

**Name of Official Completing the Review:**

**JC Harris**

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**PLANNING - Ability to anticipate and analyze problems; maps effective solutions.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comment: This sentence contains two very different questions. I cannot provide a fair response because 'averaging' in this case is meaningless. Mr. Matthias definitely has great management ability.

**ORGANIZING - Ability to arrange work efficiently and apply resources.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comment: Since I have not spoken with or seen Mr. Matthias since March 2020, I have no idea.

**SUPERVISION - Builds and motivates a team, provides direction, monitors and adjusts performance as necessary.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comment: It's an interesting question. Does one answer this based on staff satisfaction or objective results? Again, since I have no idea what's going on I cannot evaluate how well basically anything is going. But given our relatively large staff vs. other Cities, I'm concerned.

**DELEGATION – Effectively assigns work to others and builds skills.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comment:

**TIMING - Makes decisions when sufficient information is available.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comment:

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - Accurately and concisely reports and projects the financial condition; management practices and policies are designed to maintain (or achieve) a sound, long range financial condition - uses debt cautiously, plans for long term replacement and maintenance of equipment and infrastructure.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: On this one I initially chose 'Unacceptable' because the financial reporting the Council receives is just awful. However, as the question(s) are worded, we have been conservative in borrowing (good) our reserve is to standard and the State Audits have passed. This is much better than prior regimes. However, the lack of good data and especially the lack of clear forecasting is worrying.

Also, since Mr. Matthias functions as Economic Development Director, it is hard to disentangle that piece. The Council does not receive enough data to understand how well he is performing in that role relative either to other Cities or even baselines like GDP. It *seems* as though we are highly dependent on one-time money (construction) which is intrinsically unsustainable. We need better tools to determine how well those buildings are generating revenues *after* the crews are gone..

**FORGES COMPROMISES - Has the ability to resolve the numerous conflicts inherent in municipal government; is a good negotiator.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Did I mention that Mr. Matthias has not spoken to me off the dais since March 2020? :D There is no compromise.

**ANALYTICAL - In making decisions, considers the best available facts, projections and scientific evidence. To the extent that resources permit, insures these tools are available.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: The Council made a grievous error when it hired Mr. Matthias as City Manager under the arrangement that he remain as Economic Development Director. This is an intrinsic conflict of interest. There is an obvious personal bias towards any number of construction projects that makes it impossible for him to evaluate these projects objectively in his role as City Manager.

**SENSITIVITY - Listens and understands the positions and circumstances of others; communicates that understanding.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: In my two years on City Council I have sent one email to Mr. Matthias, clearly marked as 'confidential'. He immediately forwarded that to all employees. That alone merits disciplinary action. It would not be overstating the case to say that I could cite close to 100 such examples.

**COMMUNICATIONS WITH GOVERNING BODY - Accurately interprets the direction given by the governing body; keeps you well informed with concise oral and written communication.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: These semi-colons have gotta go. Yes, he interprets the will of the majority. But does he keep –me- well informed? Absolutely not. When he was elevated to City Manager, the custom was to have quarterly reviews and weekly CM reports. We now get one annual review and zero reports of his activities. Not even a calendar. Every other City Manager in the region provides some form of activity reporting to both the Council and to the public. Mr. Matthias is unique in this regard.

**COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE PUBLIC - Is open and available to the public, takes their concerns and problems seriously, recognizes the public's right and need to be well informed; is visible in the community.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Again, every other City Manager in the region provides some form of activity reporting to both the Council and to the public. Mr. Matthias is unique in this regard. Anecdotally, the reports I hear from residents are that the City often does not respond promptly to their concerns.

**COMMUNICATIONS WITH EMPLOYEES - Provides sufficient information to keep the employees productive, motivated and part of the team; understands their concerns.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Like I would know?

**CREATIVITY - Ability to reach for effective, and when necessary, inventive solutions.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments:

**HONEST, FAIR - Consistently open and straightforward.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Since our first meeting after my being elected Mr. Matthias has given preferential treatment to my colleagues and actively discriminated against me in many ways including:

1. Refusing to have contact with me either by phone, in person, or Zoom (despite having any number of such meetings with other Councilmembers)

2. Ordering his employees not to have contact with me (both on *and* off the job!)
3. Through over a hundred email exchanges where he has refused to provide information and answers to reasonable questions using excuses such as:
  - a. "I only accept questions before 4:00PM on Monday" (I have examples where the question was submitted at 4:05PM)
  - b. "That item is not on the current Agenda so I don't have to answer",
  - c. "That answer would require significant staff time to research" (with no estimate of how much that research time might entail).

Giving preferential treatment to some board members over another is a primary violation of the ICMA Code Of Ethics and should alone be grounds for disciplinary action.

**ADAPTABLE - Responds positively to a changing world and changing local conditions; does not cling to the status quo for its own sake.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: We have the poorest digital presence in the area. Given our combination of modest budget, diversity and youth, we should instead be best in class in that regard. Because that is the *only* way to we can hope to properly inform and engage our community.

In my opinion, we are following a model of economic planning that is at least a decade out of date. We keep going for these 'home runs' like the DMCBP and the hotel that never seem to be as fantastic as advertised, while basically leaving the downtown, Pac Highway and the north end of town to fend for itself.

The *raison d'être* of our current economic development strategy seems to be to redevelop not only the docks, but the landside, to attract an older, whiter, wealthier demographic that increasingly does not represent the City. The implication is that we will sell bits of the Marina Floor to further this narrative. The clear direction is to expand this model beyond the Marina Floor with further land sales. I find that disconnect—the differential between the people we hope to generate income from--and our residents—to be profound. I have no idea where that road ends but it sounds to me like development more suited to 2000 than 2021. I wish I had more data so that I could provide a more sanguine review.

**RESILIENT - Energy and motivation maintained in spite of constant demands; handles stress well.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments:

**HUMOR - Maintains and shares an appropriate sense of humor to lighten the load.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Not with me.

**HIRING - Recognizes the value of excellent employees and uses all reasonable efforts to insure the best available individuals are recruited and hired.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments:

**RISK MANAGEMENT - Implements effective programs to limit liability and loss.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments:

**LEADERSHIP - Guides effectively.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments:

**SUCCESSFUL - In spite of limited resources, makes it happen.**  
(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)



Comments:

**ACCEPTS DIRECTION - Aggressively responds to the direction of the majority of the governing body. Not sidetracked by the minority but recognizes their concerns.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: LOL. Definitely not sidetracked by the minority. I was going to leave this blank, but for posterity, there is a point to be made here: In both my time on the Council and in all the years before I was elected, I have yet to see the majority 'direct' Mr. Matthias to do anything he was not already planning on doing or did not already want to do. In other words, I honestly have never seen him be 'directed' to do *anything* of significance. So I have no idea how that would even go.

**ETHICAL - Conforms to the high standards of the profession; if a member of ICMA, knows, follows and promotes the "ICMA Code of Ethics."**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: I have already provided two examples of primary violations of ICMA Code of Ethics. I'll add one other. According to Council Rules, if a Councilmember forwards a resident's complaint or concern to the City Administration, the City is required to loop the Council in on the resolution of that issue. On numerous occasions Mr. Matthias has willfully chosen not to comply. That also should be subject to disciplinary action. The Council must be able to provide oversight of the concerns of our residents.

**JOB KNOWLEDGE - Has a solid understanding of all phases of municipal government.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: This is not a slam against Mr. Matthias per se, but I have noticed in our communications that it appeared that Mr. Matthias was unfamiliar with the basic

functioning of our sister-cities, eg. When I proposed that we record Committee Meetings, he researched other cities for some reason and did not seem to know until then that Burien does not have a Council Committee system as we do. This surprised me a bit given the amount of contact that City Managers have over various shared issues such as the airport. Going forward, I would like our City Manager and Councilmembers to attend at least one Council meeting in each of our sister cities to see the basics of how they conduct business.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Takes action to acquire new knowledge and skills. Encourages employees to do the same.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Apparently we have a 'coaching' program? I guess that's good? I have not been able to gain an understanding of that value. However, I have found the City extremely reluctant to cooperate with me in attending various educational events. Since there is obvious personal animus, perhaps Mr. Matthias is quite good with others, but as with so many other things, I have no way to know.

**CREDITS GOVERNING BODY - Credits municipal accomplishments to the policy makers; does not feel a personal ego.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Mr. Matthias has been good in this regard.

**OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY - Obtains the best possible end result for the money spent.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: On most spending decisions, the Council gets very little information about alternatives or the selection process so there is literally no way to know without doing public records requests and doing brute force data comparisons between comparable municipalities.

**COMPLETION OF PRIOR OBJECTIVES - Considering the resources available, how well CM implemented prior objectives.**

(Unacceptable) (Poor) (Acceptable) (Good) (Excellent)

Comments: Not a clue.

## **NEW OBJECTIVES**

**List any new priorities you would like the City Council to establish for the City Manager.**

Recognising that many of these would require significant re-organisation by the City Council...

1. The City web site must be fixed immediately. I have sent any number of memos on that.
2. I would like to see the City Manager publish a calendar of activities at least on a weekly basis.
3. The public meeting system should be significantly altered
  - a. Currently, meeting agendas are not properly balanced throughout the year. There is too much activity at the beginning and end of the year.
  - b. All Councilmembers should be engaged to at least some extent on the formulation of meeting agendas. There is at least *some* mechanism for that in our sister cities.
  - c. A dynamic public calendar of meeting agendas should be available, not the static Future Agendas Report. This would allow the public to be alerted when items of interest to them are going to be discussed.
  - d. Staff should not be allowed to cancel committee meetings. Even if there are no scheduled presentations, this is one of the few times where CMs can get educated on the subject matter or ask questions that can be researched. These are *Council* meetings and should be for the benefit of and at the discretion of the committee members.
4. The City Manager and Dept. Heads should allocate time every week to responding to CM inquiries. Councilmembers cannot make good decisions without learning how the corporation runs.
5. We should establish a policy which insures that all CMs have face time with department heads and are able to obtain a basic understanding of how the office and corporation work.

6. We should transition to a separate Economic Development Manager who is tasked with business formation, promotion and mentoring. Yes, we should have a 'Chamber Of Commerce' but we don't. Our rate of business formation is simply too low, while the failure rate is too high.
7. We should refocus the Economic Development Committee towards business formation and promotion.
8. We should re-instate the Planning Commission so that the public has a voice in land use.
9. The Municipal Facilities Committee has become somewhat redundant. Given its ongoing importance, we should consider supplementing it (or replacing it altogether) with a new Council Committee dedicated to the Marina. Staff should invite the DMMA to attend these meetings rather than our staff attending *their* meetings.
10. We should consider creating a Council Committee for Finance which would also have direction over IT and communications. The first goal would be to redevelop the web site with a mobile-first strategy. We should improve reporting on all city activities including finances, business, real estate, demography and public safety by an order of magnitude.
11. The Human Services Advisory Committee should publish minutes from its meetings and report quarterly to Council—as it used to do. All committees should conform to this standard.
12. We should create a Parks Advisory Committee.
13. We should hire an Environmental Strategist (see my ARPA Stimulus proposal) to formulate a Climate Action Plan, to handle relations with Sea-Tac Airport and to oversee tree cover and water quality management. Given our unique combination of environmental assets, we need someone who can always advocate for those assets without any implicit conflict over economic development.

## **OTHER WEAKNESSES**

**List any other areas in need of improvement.**

Our leadership overwhelmingly is old. And white. And male. People may think that the problem is that our staff and electeds do not 'look like Des Moines' but the fact is that, increasingly, we do not *think* like Des Moines. Someone in their sixties (and I include myself here) *cannot possibly* understand the needs wants and desires of our population which is overwhelmingly younger and more diverse across every axes.

Basically *anything* we do (from economic development to parks to *whatever*) is unconsciously skewed towards older, whiter people and that is a huge blind spot because that is *not* where our population is going and *not* where the money is going either.

It is in our interest to hire people for business development *and* the marina that understand younger demographics.

And this applies to all our civic groups. We have become incestuous—there is no other word for it. The same 30-40 people seem to be assigned to any number of committees and organisations and that has, unintentionally, created a very exclusionary system that cannot recruit a proper cross-section of our residents from all parts of Des Moines.

A primary reason to improve our digital presence is because, without new blood, people of ability, representing the entirety of Des Moines, cannot be recruited, either as candidates for City Council or Citizen groups or *nothing*. Although we have developed staff succession plans, we have not developed a *community* succession plan. This is a five alarm fire for democracy.

## **OTHER STRENGTHS**

**List other strengths which you feel are notable.**

Despite the overwhelming tone of this review, Mr. Matthias is a person of tremendous ability.

Unfortunately, I had to leave blank many categories because they imply a normal working relationship.

I confess that I would very much like to have been more ‘balanced’ in noting his obvious strengths. However I decided intentionally to leave that stuff out simply because I do not want to send mixed messages. None of his positive qualities can compensate for the deficits I have noted.

In closing I want to make two points very clearly:

- Above all things, the City Manager *must* provide sincere and equal professional treatment for all seven electeds at all times. And *no* accomplishments or personal animus can ever justify failing to do so.
- Yes ICMA has a Code Of Ethics and Mr. Matthias has failed to live up to it. However, in the end, at least some of the responsibility lies with the City Council since time and again my colleagues were made aware of and acknowledge these problems but chose not to address any of these issues.