

City of Traverse City
Periodic Performance Review
Benjamin Marentette, Interim City Manager
City Commission Closed Session
Summary of Survey 1 Results
September 15, 2025

Purpose and Process

The intent of the periodic review process is to establish clear goals, lines of communication and consistent feedback between the City Manager and the City Commission. Conducting these conversations in closed session will ideally create a space where goals can be established and honest feedback given in both directions, improving lines of communication and building trust. Specifically, the purpose of the process is:

- To gain input and insight from the outset on Benjamin's leadership, vision and goal setting.
- To help inform the City Commission and Benjamin on continuing in the role of City Manager after the interim period has elapsed.
- To create an interactive, positive learning process for everyone that lends itself to a healthy feedback culture and workplace.
- To set the stage for Team Traverse City! Creating a high impact, self aware, kind and clear team that works together for great outcomes for the City of Traverse City.

By holding these sessions every two months, the Commission and the City Manager can begin to build a clear vision for the position together, which will likely result in having a highly informed view of next steps after the interim period is over. Frequent reviews also allow the City Manager to lead by example in his wish to create a healthy feedback culture, modeling the behavior for his staff and the Commission.

The process consists of three review periods, each culminating in a closed session conversation on September 15, November 17 and January 12. We are using a developmental approach that builds on what we are hearing from Commissioners and staff. Survey 1 asked open-ended, aspirational questions and was intended to help set the tone and inform the future direction for the City Manager.

Participation and Results

The survey was sent to seven Commissioners, 12 Department Heads, Deputy City Manager, and the Executive Directors of TCLP and the DDA. Responses were gathered from six of seven Commissioners and 14 of 15 staff and others.

Overall, the responses were very positive and supportive. Though Benjamin has been in the role for less than three months, he has gained respect and trust from an overwhelming percentage of the Commission and staff. Many cited his decades-long tenure at the City and the knowledge and relationships he has built over time. Some of the qualities most often noted include:

- Communication style: described as clear, honest, open, inclusive, humble, caring, available, candid, responsive
- Approach to people and issues: curious, supportive, inclusive, listening, trusting, modeling respectful behavior, proactive, setting clear boundaries and expectations, transparent, solutions-focused, adaptive

There were also suggestions for going forward:

- Recognizing the many leadership transitions over the past several years and a need to find solid footing
- Desiring a clear accountability structure, goal setting, measurable objectives, and defining what success looks like
- Helping the Commission navigate their role as the board and providing the right amount of data to support their decision making

Ideas of how Benjamin can support the Commission and staff:

- Being a navigator, fact finder, facilitator
- Creating a clear vision, expectations and timelines
- Creating a safe environment by engaging and encouraging, providing regular touch points, giving grace where needed
- Trusting and using the expertise of staff, giving them autonomy where it makes sense
- Investing in staff professional development
- Creating a flexible work environment
- Providing clear and regular communication and reports that facilitate data-driven decision making; consider asset management as a tool for all departments

Advice for how to lead and inspire:

- Being humble and willing to own mistakes
- Listening and being curious, willing to learn
- Staying true to who you are and continuing to align your actions with what was laid out in your acceptance speech
- Pacing the work - it's okay to slow the pace if needed, give space and time to respond, consider not making big changes until/if appointed the permanent City Manager
- Staying positive, kind, fair, empathetic and honest. Focusing on the greater good.

Overall, the feedback was very positive and hopeful. There are aspirations and suggestions for what to work on, which will help Benjamin as he grows in this role.