

## City Council Evaluation of City Manager Michael Ciaravino | August 25, 2020

From day one, emergent issues required Michael to hit the ground running. Almost immediately upon his arrival, Michael was faced with several challenging legal matters, and since has faced an ongoing series of problematic employee actions and regulatory compliance issues that have consumed his time. Staff departures have required Michael to assume multiple roles; litigation and other legal matters (e.g. legal review of public records requests) have consumed much of his bandwidth. A mere eleven months after Michael's arrival in Mill Creek, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a host of other unanticipated challenges, from budgeting for unforeseen revenue shortfalls to needing to design and implement new systems for both in-person and remote service delivery.

Michael has worked tirelessly in response to these many challenges, and the City Council is extremely grateful for his efforts. We are committed to helping Michael succeed here at Mill Creek. Overall, Michael's performance has met, and in some cases exceeded, our expectations; however, there are some areas where improvement is needed, which we discuss below.

Looking back on the last 15 months, being able to simply "keep the wheels on" is itself is a significant accomplishment. We thank Michael for that. Michael has brought to light a number of important issues and has demonstrated an important attention to detail. We are pleased with some improvements in the quality of staff briefings to Council. We see that Michael is helping the City to catch up on several backlog items. We are also particularly pleased with some of the capital projects accomplished this past year including acquiring the church property on SR 527; stormwater infrastructure repairs; completion of Exploration Park; and beginning of much needed repairs to Heron Park.

Due to the recent layoffs, staff departures, and turnover in leadership positions, we observe low morale in City Hall. This is deeply concerning to all of us, and we are ready to work with Michael as a Council to do what we can to improve this situation. We believe we share with Michael the goal that Mill Creek be a place where staff are proud to come to work, and all staff members feel they are trusted and valued members of a team. While we do not yet have all the answers (and it is not our role to intervene with staff), we are committed to working with Michael to improve the situation in whatever ways we can.

We agree with Michael that recruiting and empowering a strong team of department managers needs to be the top priority in the coming months. Michael cannot continue to wear multiple hats. We are concerned that he is "burning the candle at both ends." He needs to find a healthy balance between work and family/life responsibilities in the coming year. To do this, Michael will need skilled senior level team members across the organization: accomplishing this is a very high priority for Council moving forward. In particular, finding replacements for the Finance

Director and Chief of Police, and bringing human resources skills on board (whether by contract, or as an employee) must in our view be top of the list in terms of recruitments. Michael also needs to better define the role of the Chief of Staff, as the position is not yet being fully utilized and leading to the results Council had hoped when we agreed to fund it.

We count on the City Manager to be the chief executive officer of the City. We look to him to both execute our policy direction, and also bring us solidly vetted options in terms of policy and ideas. We rely on the City Manager to recruit excellent staff and empower them to do their jobs. Working with the Council, we expect he will help us shape the vision for the future of our City, and as our spokesperson, expect that he will set the tone of the relationship between City Hall and our residents, business owners and the media.

We believe Michael shares our vision for the role of the City Manager. Michael has many strengths that serve him well in this regard. He is clear about his role in the execution of Council-established policy. Particularly noteworthy to us are his legal acumen, risk awareness, intelligence, strong ethical compass, personal integrity, professionalism and analytic skills. And importantly, he accepts responsibility for what is happening at City Hall, whether the actions involved are his or those of staff. It is clear that “the buck stops with” Michael.

We hope to see more organizational leadership from Michael in the coming year, as he gains the capacity to move out of crisis mode, operate more at the policy level, and lead the City forward in alignment with our goals and values.

Michael has built a good foundational relationship with Council in his initial 15 months at the City. We greatly value his honesty, truthfulness and professionalism working with us. The main request we make is that he work with us as a Council to implement more regular and timely communication with all Councilmembers. We will work with Michael to improve the lines of communication between him and the Council, which may include weekly meetings with both the Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem, as well as regular meetings with the other Council members. More frequent emails might be another means of keeping Council “in the loop.” Those are just a few ideas and we are open to other ideas if Michael wants to suggest a different approach. We encourage Michael to err on the side of communicating with us early on significant issues, rather than waiting for a perfect data set to be developed before responding.

Overall, we give Michael high marks for valuing the importance of engaging with our community. He has built a solid relationship with the School Superintendent and was active in a number of community groups before COVID (we encourage him to re-engage in the online options that have been created for continued participation with community groups). Michael also goes out of his way to personally, and promptly, respond to inquiries from citizens that Council members receive and forward to him. We want to see more community engagement (e.g., regular attendance at Chamber meetings) from Michael in the coming year.

The media relationship is a critical one; we want the City to be more on top of how we communicate to the community, and to do so in alignment with adopted City Policy.

We encourage Michael to work with his administrative staff to develop some protocols that will make him more accessible to staff. We encourage Michael to delegate more as new staff come on board. And, we encourage him to find more opportunities to communicate constructively with all staff; to put additional effort into building trust with, and providing positive feedback to, staff. We all want to see a collaborative, skilled, creative, highly motivated and optimistic staff team in place. Michael has a critical role in making this happen.

We encourage Michael to be more straightforward and clear in his communications, and less legalistic in the way he speaks and in the way he approaches, analyzes and responds to issues.

We greatly appreciate that Michael is financially conservative, as that fits well with the values of this Council. We give Michael high marks for his financial management of the City in the last year, and appreciate his forward thinking on financial matters. Recent financial presentations have been very helpful; we would ask that they be provided to us on a more consistent basis. We continue to have concern about the amount legal fees the City is incurring. Council appreciated the recent update he provided to the Council in Executive Session on this issue. We would like to have more clarity on pending litigation and the attendant costs. We would like to work with Michael to chart a path to reduce legal fees going forward.

Our Commitments to Michael. The Council is committed to Michael's success, and to doing what we can to build up on our current positive relationship with him. In particular, we will make ourselves available for regular one-on-one meetings with Michael. We are committed to working with Michael to improve teamwork and communication between ourselves and the City Manager. We acknowledge that communication is a two way street and we need to work to provide more clear direction to the City Manager. We commit to doing a more timely review of Michael's performance next year, including at a minimum a mid-year check-in.

Priorities for the Next Year. In terms of the items that we would like to see in Michael's work plan in the next year, we identify the following top priorities:

1. Get a strong and complete executive team in place.
2. Improve communications, both internal and external.
3. Build a more positive, collaborative and trusting workplace environment at City Hall.
4. Develop a plan to address our systemic budget issues and long-term financial sustainability.
5. Conduct regular evaluations and exit interviews consistent with the City's personnel policies and employment best practices.
6. Provide regular quarterly financial updates to review actuals versus budget.

7. Develop a communications and marketing plan for the City.
8. Propose a set of key performance indicators for City government, and a plan for implementing measurement of these indicators.

We look forward to confirming with Michael in September his priorities for the remainder of 2020, and to receiving a proposed 2021 work plan from him by the end of January that reflects our budget priorities and adopted City values and goals.

Minority Statement from Councilmember Steckler:

This evaluation reflects the opinions of the majority of the council but it does not reflect all of the opinions or recommendations of Councilman John Steckler.