

Strategies for Dealing with Difficult City Council Members



TIM ROONEY
MUSTANG CITY MANAGER

Background

- Undergrad in Regional Planning
- MBA from Southern Nazarene University
- First full-time City Planner for the City of Owasso
- City Planner > Community Development Director > ACM (1992-2009)
- Borough Manager in Wrangell, Alaska (2009-2013)
- Hired as City Manager for Mustang (August 2013)

What I Knew

- Expected Growth
- Website Lacking/No Social Media Presence
- Conservative Community
- Family Oriented
- Commercial Base Needed Expansion
- Parks Director was Serving as Interim

What I Didn't Know

- Leadership Vacuum
- Previous City Manager/City Council Issues
- Mass Exodus Was About to Occur
- Mayor Involvement/Intervention

What I Learned

After the Interview – Before I Took Over the Position

- All Councilmembers Not Part of the Hiring Process
- One Councilmember Vocalized Opinion in Local Newspaper
- Constant bombardment of Interim City Manager/Staff
- Failure of Council to Police Themselves

Welcome to Mustang



The Fun Begins

Traffic Enforcement

Sinking Fund

Capital Improvements

Health Reimbursement

Sewer Main

1998 Revenue

Utility Deposits

Park Improvements

Mustang

General Reserve

2012 GO Bond Fund

Improvements

Authority

2007 GO Bond

General Revenue Service

1999 & 2006 Bond Fund

MIA Reserve Fund

Economic Dev Authority

ANY & All Others

The Fun Begins

Traffic Enforcement

Sinking Fund

Capital Improvement

Health Reimbursement

Sewer

1998 Revenue

Utility Deposits

Park Improvement

Must

General Reserve

2012 GO Bond Fund

Improvements

Authority

2007 GO Bond

Local Revenue Service

1999 & 2006 Bond Fund

MIA Reserve Fund

Economic Dev Authority

ANY & All Others

Written Communication

“I still enjoy what I some time refer to as Cinderella stories or fairy tales”.

“I do not require anything from you in order for me to ‘need clarity and understanding’”.

“I do not need ask, or want your encouragement and I know that I am welcome to conduct my own affairs in a manner subject to only my choosing”.

“I suppose that when you were employed and came to the City of Mustang as City Manager, my hopes and expectations were much too great”.

“I thought perhaps you would be the Messiah that Mustang needs so badly....”.

“I write this letter to you for the purpose of expressing my displeasure and utter disgust”.

“I direct you to....(fill in the blank here)”.

City Manager's Reports

Included Correspondence from the Council Member

Shared report via email and on City's website

Provided Brief Summary of Correspondence

Cooperation from Local Newspapers – No Longer Published

His Letters to the Editor

Increased Public Awareness of the Problem

Found Champions

Found three well respected “long-term residents and business people in the community.

Realtor; Heavily involved in Chamber of Commerce

Former Basketball Coach, Realtor, Developer & Father of one of the Canadian County Commissioners

Developer; Heavily involved in Chamber of Commerce

Set the Plan in Motion

“As I have communicated to you previously, if you are unhappy with my performance as you certainly seem to indicate, you are welcome to request an Executive Session to discuss it at the next Council meeting”.

Councilor Mount,

Thank you for your email. I will answer the questions/requests/statements in the order in which they were presented.

Question 1 – How, when, where and who was contacted with the firm of “Public Finance Law Group, PLLC”?

I contacted Mr. Jon Wolff with Municipal Finance Services, Inc by telephone on Tuesday, October 22, 2013. Mr. Wolff asked me to summarize our conversation via email which I did and sent to him on October 22, 2013. (That email is attached for your information and review). Mr. Wolff then contacted Mr. Allan Brooks with Public Finance Law Group, PLLC via email on October 22, 2013 as well. A copy of that email is also attached for your information and review.

Request 1 – I would like to know what form, means, or method the “yes” answer was received.

I received a phone call from Mr. Brooks on Tuesday, October 29, 2013 informing me that it would be an appropriate expenditure to be charged to the expansion project. While I have not asked Mr. Brooks to provide that answer in writing, I will be happy to do so should you desire it.

Statement 1 – Perhaps I could just come up to City Hall and look at these.

Should you desire to review the attached emails at City Hall as is indicated in your email, please set up an appointment to do so and I will print them out for you.

Statement 2 – I hope that in the future I do not hear any more about Bond Counsel requiring this and Bond Counsel was immediately contacted by staff and Bond Counsel said “yes”.

Whenever I have a question as to the appropriateness of a charge to a bond project, I will continue to contact Bond Counsel for direction. There was nothing in any of my communication to you that said Bond Counsel “required” anything. As I have communicated to you previously, if you are unhappy with my performance as you certainly seem to indicate, you are welcome to request an Executive Session to discuss it at the next Council meeting.

Have a pleasant evening.

Sincerely,

Timothy D. Rooney
City Manager
City of Mustang

What Happened?

- Councilmember Never Requested an Executive Session or to Speak to the Correspondence at City Council Meetings
- Ran for Re-election in 2014 – Was Defeated by a 3 to 1 Margin
- Letters Became Less Frequent, but More Caustic and Toxic
- Ran for Re-election in 2017 – Was Defeated by Even Larger Margin

What Does ICMA Recommend?

- Interestingly enough, not a lot of content on the ICMA website regarding dealing with a Councilmember that is a bully.
- There is a great deal of content on improving Council/Manager relations, but all very elementary and little specifics.

ICMA Recommendations

- Make it Clear Whose Role is Whose
- Meet Individually with Each Councilmember
- Council and Management Hold Each Other Accountable
- Develop Ethics and Conduct Policy for City Council

ICMA Code of Ethics

Adhering to the ICMA Code of Ethics was difficult and may have been problematic or a violation.

- Tennant 10 vs Tennant 3
- In Order to Safeguard Tennant 10 it became difficult to follow Tennant 3
- Much Broader Discussion

After 4.5 Years

- Last Correspondence

Mr. Donal Mount
2000 E Highway 152
Mustang, OK 73064

RE: Letters Dated April 24, 2017 and April 25, 2017

Dear Mr. Mount,

Thank you for your most recent correspondence.

It has become evident in my nearly four year tenure with the City of Mustang that any and all answers this organization provides to you will never ever be acceptable. We continue to waste countless hours of the taxpayer's dollars responding to you, only to receive smug responses that disagree with factual accounting that has already been audited. Let's just call it what it is: You do not understand municipal accounting, you are a bully that likes to hide behind a keyboard, and you like to threaten people – most notably public employees.

You served on the City Council and you know when this body meets. You are welcome to attend a City Council meeting and be heard at any time or share with them what a terrible job you believe I am doing as a manager of projects, water and wastewater utilities, or this organization as a whole. Until I receive direction from the City Council at a public meeting to respond to you, I will not be responding to anymore of your letters. As always, staff will respond to Open Records Requests.

Sincerely,



Timothy D. Rooney
City Manager

A teal square containing the text "Any Questions?" in a white, cursive font. The text is centered and surrounded by a white sunburst graphic consisting of several short, radiating lines.

Any
Questions?