

CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: June 3rd, 2025

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To: Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers
From: Deborah Muchmore, Human Resources Consultant
Responsible Department: Acting City Manager/Administrative Services
Subject: Presentation on Selecting a Leader: A Common Executive Search Process for Position of City Manager

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RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the City Council receive and file an informational presentation outlining the executive search process commonly used in selecting a City Manager. No action is currently required. The informational presentation is titled *"Selecting a Leader: A Common Executive Search Process for the Position of City Manager."*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City Manager plays a critical role in overseeing the daily operations of the City and implementing policies set by the City Council. When the position becomes vacant, a thorough, transparent, and strategic executive search process is essential to identify and hire the most qualified and effective leader for the community.

BACKGROUND

On April 15, 2025, the City Council and City Manager Don Schwartz mutually agreed to end their professional relationship. The action was effective immediately resulting in a vacancy in the City Manager position. The following day, on April 16, 2025, the City Council approved the appointment of Mary Gourley as Acting City Manager.

This item is intended to provide the City Council and the public with information about best practices and typical steps involved in the recruitment of a new City Manager.

DISCUSSION:

This presentation provides an informative overview of best practices and key steps involved in a typical executive search process for the position of City Manager. Topics to be covered include:

- Phase 1: Planning and Preparation
 - Request for Proposals from Executive Search Firms
 - Hiring of a professional executive search firm (if applicable)
 - Identify core leadership competencies
 - Ascertain current and future key issues facing the City, community, and the position
 - Define position expectations and ideal candidate profile
 - Community and stakeholder engagement strategy
- Phase 2: Materials Development
 - Identify competencies and attributes for success in the position
 - Develop a recruitment strategy and a search timeline
 - Develop marketing materials, brochures, messaging, and ad plan
 - Discuss selection processes
- Phase 3: Recruitment and Outreach
 - Brochures, marketing and print materials are posted and distributed
 - Direct mail campaigns are enacted

- Focused marketing of the position through professional networks and platforms
 - Outreach to diverse and qualified candidate pools
 - Recruitment is open and applications are accepted
- Phase 4: Screening and Evaluation
 - Initial application review and screening interviews
 - Identify the highest and best fit candidates for Council interviews
 - Reference evaluations
 - Council subcommittee or full Council interview processes
- Phase 5: Selection and Appointment
 - Public engagement/input (if applicable)
 - Final interviews and Council deliberation
 - Negotiation and Background and other Post Offer exams
- Phase 6: Onboarding and Transition
 - Contract finalization and Appointment of the selected candidate
 - Introduction to the community
 - Support for transition planning and performance expectations

This process reflects a commitment to transparency, equity, and good governance. Public engagement and input may be sought at various points to ensure alignment with community values and priorities.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

The departure of the former City Manager and the upcoming appointment of an Interim City Manager create an opportunity for the City Council to begin planning a thoughtful and strategic recruitment process for a permanent City Manager. This agenda item serves to provide foundational information on industry best practices commonly used in executive searches for top-level municipal leadership positions. Given the significance of this role, it is critical that the recruitment process be well-organized, transparent, and inclusive.

Staff believe it is important to provide the Council and the public with a clear understanding of this process early on.

CITY COUNCIL GOALS/PRIORITIES/ AND OR GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:

This agenda item represents the City Council goals/priorities as follows:

Goal 4: HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATION

Restoring public trust

Improve Public Communications

This agenda item represents the City Council General Plan Consistency (if applicable):

Action CHW 5a: Review all City policies and programs, and new proposed policies and programs to ensure that they support equal opportunities and equal access.

Policy CSF 6-2: Solicit feedback from residents and citizens regarding City-initiated projects, programs, and outreach efforts

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this informational presentation. City staff will return to a publicly noticed Council meeting with an agenda item for consideration of seeking requests for proposals from professional executive search firms. Cost estimates and funding options will be presented at that time for Council review and direction.

The proposed Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget includes an allocation of \$35,000 specifically for the recruitment of a permanent City Manager.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

This item has been noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting date. The City has also used social media to promote and advertise the City Council Meeting Agenda Items.

As of the writing of this agenda item report, the City has not received any public comment. If staff receive public comment from interested parties following the publication and distribution of this agenda item report, such comments will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials before or at the meeting and will be posted to the city website.

RESTATED RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Council receive the informational presentation on Selecting a Leader: A Common Executive Search Process for Position of City Manager.

OPTIONS:

None

ATTACHMENT(S):

Presentation

APPROVALS:

Department Head Responsible for Agenda Item: Mary Gourley / Deborah Muchmore Approval Date: 5/29/2025

CEQA Determination (Community Development/Planning): Approval Date: 05/29/2025

This item has been determined to be exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act.

Administrative Services (Financial): Approval Date: 05/29/2025

Costs authorized in City Approved Budget: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☒ N/A

Account Code (if applicable) (Please list which account the funds are to be allocated from:

The proposed Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget includes an allocation of \$35,000 specifically for the recruitment of a permanent City Manager.

City Attorney Approval Approval Date: 05/29/2025

City Manager Approval: Approval Date: 05/29/2025

SELECTING A LEADER

City of Sebastopol
City Council Meeting
June 3, 2025, Item #9

Agenda Item Number: 9

A Common Executive Search Process

Search processes may have six or more major phases, including:

- Stakeholder / Staff Engagement Meetings
- Profile and Materials Development
- Outreach and Marketing
- Preliminary Candidate Screening and Final Candidate List
- Selection Processes (there may be oral, written, advisory, and practical elements)
- Reference, Background, Physical, Medical, and Appointment

PHASE ONE – Planning and Preparation

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During the initial weeks of an executive search, City staff works closely with the search team and the Council or ad hoc committee to:

- Determine the methods to collect information about the organization
- Ascertain the current and future key issues facing the City, community, and the position
- Describe the functions and work environment in which the position will work
- Define the people, responsibilities, and customers the position will lead and serve
- Develop a position profile
- Develop Community and stakeholder engagement strategy

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PHASE TWO – Profile and Materials Development

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Using the information gleaned in Phase One, a position profile and search materials are developed:

- Develop competencies and attributes for success in the position
- Develop a recruitment strategy
- Develop a search timeline
- Develop marketing materials, brochures, messaging, and ad plan
- Discuss selection processes

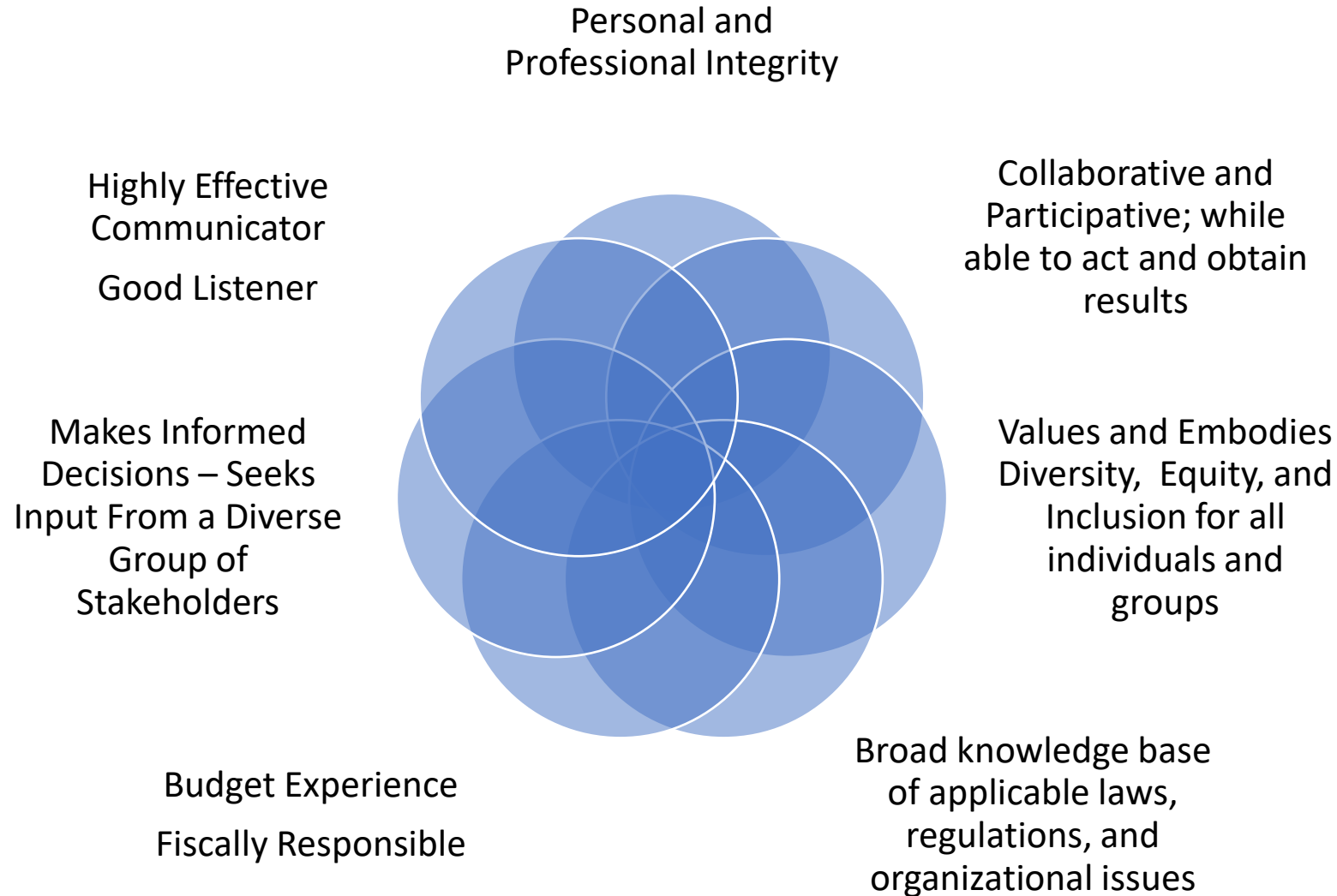
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Some Key Leadership Attributes

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PHASE THREE – Outreach and Marketing

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A strategic marketing campaign allows the attraction of a broad and qualified pool of candidates. During this phase:

- Brochures, marketing, and print materials are posted and distributed
- Direct mail campaigns are enacted
- Focused email and social media campaigns are initiated
- Recruitment is open and applications are accepted

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PHASE FOUR – PRELIMINARY CANDIDATE SCREEN – FINAL LIST

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During Phase Four, the search team reviews all candidate submissions and makes initial calls and interviews with candidates to identify those candidates that best meet the competencies, qualities, and needs identified in the profile developed in steps one and two.

- Sort candidates for qualities and competencies
- Seek to identify special skills or attributes to meet organizational needs
- Develop candidate profiles and rank candidates for final list
- Identify highest and best fit candidates for final selection
- Provide a PDF or binder of all candidates including a list of those not considered for interview, resumes and cover letters of those minimally qualified, and additional candidate profiles for the most qualified candidates

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PHASE FIVE – Selection Process

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Working closely with staff and Council or Ad Hoc Committee, the recruitment team will:

- Initiate an inclusive selection process
- Include advisory or ad hoc committee panel(s)
- Schedule a final interview panel or Board
- A final candidate will emerge
- Negotiate, make conditional offer
- Initiate background and other post offer exams

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PHASE SIX – Selection Process

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The successful candidate will receive a conditional offer letter and undergo a series of post-offer selection examinations including reference and background checks.

Once clear, an appointment can be made.

The process is confidential until an appointment is made to protect the candidates and any current employers.

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PHASE SIX – Onboarding and Transition

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Final steps to a new leader:

- Contract finalization
- Appointment at a Regular Meeting
- Introduction to the Community
- Support for transition and performance planning

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POSSIBLE SEARCH TIMELINE

POSSIBLE SEARCH TIMELINE UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS

The following timeline is an estimate based on experience and currently anticipated delays due to businesses still closed in response to the pandemic. The actual time may be one to two months faster or slower than indicated.

- **Month 1:**
 - Stakeholder Engagement Meetings
- **Month 2:**
 - Profile and Materials Development
- **Month 3 to 4**
 - Outreach and Marketing - Search for Candidates
- **Month 5**
 - Preliminary Screening – Final Candidate List
- **Month 5 to 6:**
 - Selection Processes
- **Month 6 to 7:**
 - Reference, Background, and Appointment

Thank you!

Request for Questions.

