

City of Perris

Background

Problems regarding the management, operation and financial condition of the City of Perris were brought to the attention of the 1998-99 Riverside County Grand Jury. As a result, an investigation was conducted to determine what appropriate recommendations could be offered to assist in resolving the situation.

The City of Perris is a general law city, covering approximately thirty-five square miles with a population in excess of 35,000. The city is governed by four at-large elected councilpersons serving four-year staggered terms, and an at-large elected mayor serving a two-year term. The elected mayor has the same powers as a councilperson.

This city has suffered management and financial problems for a number of years. A 1991-92 Grand Jury report found that the city council members at the time frequently bypassed the city manager, interfered with the operation of city departments and personnel, and failed to comply with California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) requirements. Similar shortcomings are the subject of this report.

Findings

- 1.The City of Perris has experienced an unusually high turnover of city managers. Over the last ten years, there have been nine city managers. The present city manager is serving on a part time basis.
- 2.The City of Perris does not have an assistant city manager or an administrative services director.
- 3.The finance director is an interim part time contract employee who oversees the financial manager and six clerks.
- 4.The city council has no finance committee to review the city's financial transactions and to make recommendations to the council.
- 5.No independent city planning commission exists to consider public input, review and provide guidance, to the city council on residential and industrial development. The city council, acting as a planning commission, does not allow for an impartial appeal process.
- 6.The City of Perris does not have a policy outlining the use of the city attorney. Unnecessary costs are being incurred when the city attorney is consulted about matters that would be more appropriately answered by other established sources.

7. Members of the city council bypass the chain of management. This interferes with the duties of city employees and impedes the efficient operation of the city. This also negatively impacts employee morale.

8. At council meetings, members of the public have voiced their concerns over the debatable financial activities of some council members.

9. Comments by councilpersons during public council meetings demonstrate a lack of civility toward other council members and the city administration.

10. The council study sessions are scheduled immediately before the regular city council meetings. This does not always allow adequate time to review the matters under discussion and obtain answers to questions that may arise.

11. A technical advisory committee consisting of county and city administrators has been formed to advise the City of Perris on possible solutions to financial and administrative problems.

Recommendations

The Perris City Council:

1. Stabilize the position of city manager with an experienced, permanent, full time administrator.

2. Hire a qualified administrative services director who can also serve as assistant city manager.

3. Employ a full time, permanent financial director.

4. Establish a finance committee with written guidelines to conduct in-depth reviews of the city's financial transactions and budgeting processes to provide a clear financial picture for the city council's action.

5. Reinstate the independent planning commission appointed from the local population to solicit public input and advise the city council on future development. This will also provide for an equitable appeal process.

6. Implement a policy directing that all requests for city attorney services or opinions be channeled through the office of the city manager.

7. Ensure that all administrative/operational requests by city council members are properly routed through the city manager.

8. Assure that all financial activities conform with accepted ethical principles and are able to withstand public scrutiny.

9. Conduct themselves at council meetings with proper decorum and refrain from demeaning personal comments.

10. Schedule the study sessions sufficiently in advance of the city council meetings so that all members have time to study agenda items and receive answers to questions they may have.

11. Consider, utilize and support the advice and recommendations of the technical advisory committee.