

MEMO

Date: September 29, 2025

To: Mayor David Anderson
Vice Mayor Jeanne Hess
Commissioner Don Cooney
Commissioner Qianna Decker
Commissioner Stephanie Hoffman
Commissioner Chris Praedel
Commissioner Alonzo Wilson

From: Pamela J. Wideman, Sr. Manager
Kelsey Batt, Recruitment Specialist

Re: City of Kalamazoo; City Manager Survey (Final Survey Responses)

An anonymous, four-question survey was available to community members from August 4 through August 28, both online and at City Hall. The survey was designed to help the City Commission understand the qualities, values, and priorities that matter most to residents in selecting Kalamazoo's next City Manager. A total of 430 people responded, encompassing submissions both online, at City Hall, and through individual paper surveys collected at community sessions. Also, included are responses from the Community Feedback Sessions held in August 2025.

Participants responded to the following questions:

1. What traits, qualities, and characteristics does the City Manager need to be successful in this role?
Select your top five choices.
2. What do you believe are the three top priorities for Kalamazoo's next City Manager?
3. What advice do you have for the next City Manager?
4. Is there anything else you would like the City Commission to consider when selecting a new City Manager?

The findings are presented in the most authentic format while having been adjusted to remove any disparaging or offensive comments. The findings are presented as follows:

Pages 3-4	Executive Summary
Page 5	Question 1: Quantitative Results • High-level overview of key themes across all four survey questions.
Pages 6-39	Question 2: Open-Ended Responses by Theme
Pages 39-43	Questions 3: Thematic Summaries with Quotes
Pages 43-45	Question 4: Thematic Summaries with Quotes

Appendix A Pages 46-51	Question 1: Full Open-Ended “Other” Responses
Appendix B Pages 51-77	Question 3: Full Open-Ended Responses
Appendix C Pages 77-104	Question 4: Full Open-Ended Responses
Appendix D Pages 105-112	Community Session Group Feedback

No substantive changes have been made that alter the core message expressed by the respondents. However, all open-ended comments have undergone a light editorial review. This process involved correcting minor grammatical and punctuation errors, spelling mistakes, and editing disparaging language for improved readability. Potentially identifying personal details, offensive language, or direct personal attacks have also been removed or anonymized.

Executive Summary

Community input, gathered through an anonymous four-question survey (available online, at City Hall, and via individual paper surveys collected at community sessions) and facilitated community group discussions, highlighted several consistent themes about the next City Manager's role in Kalamazoo.

Key Traits

Residents overwhelmingly prioritized a City Manager with knowledge in economic development, affordable housing, and infrastructure (57.67%), strong integrity (56.51%), and a community-focused approach (55.58%). Excellent communication and listening skills (42.79%) and a commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion (39.53%) completed the top five. Other frequently emphasized qualities included being a visionary and strategic thinker, collaborative, and dependable in following through on commitments.

Top Priorities

The most frequently cited priorities for the new City Manager were addressing homelessness and housing affordability, strengthening public safety and crime reduction, fostering economic development and downtown revitalization, and improving infrastructure and transportation. Ensuring fiscal stability and enhancing neighborhood quality of life were also prominent concerns.

Advice to the Next City Manager

Residents urged the new City Manager to be visible, accessible, and collaborative, emphasizing the importance of listening before acting and building trust. Key advice also included balancing short-term operational demands with a long-term vision for the city.

Additional Considerations

Further considerations for the City Commission included selecting a leader demonstrating accountability, ethical leadership, and a sustained focus on youth and overall community well-being. Notably, while many championed diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, some feedback also expressed explicit opposition to "woke" or "DEI practices," highlighting a nuanced community sentiment on this topic.

Community Session Highlights

Community session participants consistently emphasized the need for a City Manager who is deeply community-focused, visible, and engaged, demonstrating integrity, honesty, and transparency in all actions. Key desired traits include strong communication and listening skills, a commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) with an anti-racism and equity lens, and the courage to act decisively while being self-aware and unbiased.

Top priorities identified focused on addressing affordable housing and mental health services, alongside fiscal stewardship and ensuring a safe city for everyone. Advice to the next City Manager underscored the importance of regular engagement with all neighborhoods and community groups, active listening to understand diverse perspectives, rebuilding trust, and transparent communication.

Additional considerations for the City Commission included taking time for the selection, prioritizing community trust, and selecting a leader based on genuine drive and qualifications, with a fresh, outside perspective, rather than solely on demographics.

Overall, the survey results underscore a community's desire for strong, ethical administrative leadership, deeply engaged with residents and responsive to a broad spectrum of needs, from essential services to long-term strategic growth.