

# Ten essential practices of effective elected officials

AWC Annual Conference  
Spokane, WA  
June 22, 2023  
Presenter: Jon Mutchler

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## Intro: About Jon

Seven children, three sons-in-law



Four grandchildren &  
38 years of marriage



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## Jon's Education and Professional Experience

- Associate of Science, Olympic Community College (Bremerton)
- B.Mus, Western Washington University (Bellingham, WA)
- Master of Divinity, Regent College (Vancouver, B.C.)
- Ordination, The Christian and Missionary Alliance
- Founding and lead pastor, Ferndale Alliance Church (1988-present)
- Professional pianist and piano teacher (1975-present)



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## Jon's Political Experience

- Ferndale City Council (2010 - 2015)
- Whatcom County Charter Review Commissioner (2015)
- Ferndale City Mayor (2016-2019)
- Ferndale City Council (2022-present)



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Ferndale is a Code City with the Council-Mayor form of government [RCW 35A.12]

“Strong mayor” / “Weak mayor” (1999)

“Executive mayor” / “Ceremonial mayor”

Ferndale, WA: Pop 15,500

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Why do we do this? Why do we run?



- Fame
- Prestige?
- Money?
- Influence?
- Power?
- Status?
- Ambition?
- Duty?
- Vision?
- Anger?
- Revenge?
- Legacy?

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Hopefully, we have a bigger vision than Mr. Hanscom:

**Russell L. Hanscom**

9523 S. 237th Place  
Kent, WA 98031

(253) 859-9567  
russ\_hanscom@hotmail.com  
www.russellhanscom.us



**Education:** Bachelor of Science, Walla Walla College Master of Health Administration, University of Washington

**Occupation:** Executive Director, Elder Services, Puyallup Tribe of Indians

**Statement:** Frankly, I'm not really sure I want this job. The pay is crummy, it takes time away from my family, and it's pretty thankless a lot of the time.

However, my lack of enthusiasm does not diminish my competence or honesty.

I'm writing this statement on August 4 and I'm right in the middle of starting a business. If the business takes off like it's supposed to, between now and November, I sincerely doubt I'll have enough time to be an effective representative for your concerns.

I honestly don't know what else to say. This is the reality I'm facing today.

2017

Kent City Council

Position 6

Voter Guide

Candidate Statement

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“Frankly, I’m not really sure I want this job. The pay is crummy, it takes time away from my family, and it’s pretty thankless a lot of the time.



“However, my lack of enthusiasm does not diminish my competence or honesty.

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“I honestly don’t know what else to say. This is the reality I’m facing today.” (Russell Hanscom)

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### Russell L. Hanscom

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Mr. R. Hanscom had which result in the November 7, 2017 General Election?

A. Less than 30 %

B. Between 30-40%

C. Between 40-50%

D. More than 50%

Place your bets.  
Choose one:

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### City Of Kent Council Position No. 6

Candidate	Vote	Vote %
Brenda Fincher	12,654	73.97%
Russell L. Hanscom	4,453	26.03%
Total Votes (not including write-ins)	17,107	

### Brenda Fincher

327 2nd Ave S  
Kent, WA 98032

(253) 946-8288  
info@brendafincher.com  
www.brendafincher.com



Education: Associate of Arts Degree, Riverside Community College; Scripture and Leadership Training Certificate, Seattle University

Occupation: Kent City Council Member; Parish Administrator, Holy Spirit Parish

Statement: I'm working to make sure every Kent resident feels safe and has the opportunity to thrive.

Keeping Kent affordable is a priority. I voted against raising your taxes and funded parks by using our money more efficiently. I've worked to proactively manage growth to keep rents from skyrocketing like we've seen in other cities.

I'm the only candidate in this race who has consistently shown up for votes and voters. I'm accessible and accountable to everyone. You've seen me in our neighborhoods, events and meetings almost every day - and not just in election years.

Diversity - in all forms - strengthens us. Every Kent resident should feel welcome and respected.

I unite people and get results. I'm supported by leaders in both parties, our mayor, fellow councilmembers, business owners, neighborhood leaders, police officers, firefighters and our sheriff.

It's an honor to serve you. I ask for your vote.

And the winner is...

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## Trait #1: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. — And NOT just a little bit



- Your opponents
- Your fellow elected officials
- Your mayor/executive
- Business owners/leaders
- The voters
- The citizens
- City staff
- Even hostile citizens



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## Trait #1: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. — And not just a little bit

If you become your opponent;  
if you behave like your enemy;  
They have won!

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**Trait #1: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. — And not just a little bit**

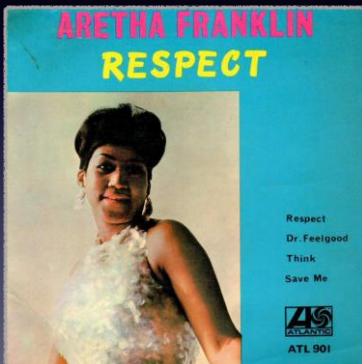
You gotta be  
thick skinned.  
Or you won't  
last!



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**Trait #1: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. — And not just a little bit**



**Simple Tips You Already Know:**

- Never make it “personal,” — even if provoked
- Listen to Mom: “If you can’t say something nice about someone ... ”
- Make sure you can articulate the other side of an argument and in terms that your opponent will agree and know that you understand him/her

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## Trait #1: R.E.S.P.E.C.T. — And not just a little bit

### 12. DECORUM

The City Council will treat City staff and members of the public with a high level of professionalism and respect, and Councilmembers require City staff and members of the public to extend the same courtesy. Differences of opinion, values, and perspectives are expected, and it is essential the atmosphere and tone of Council meetings be professional and respectful, to foster public trust, confidence, and participation by citizens.

Personal attacks, insults, interruptions, inflammatory language, and profanity are not permitted. Nor are remarks that disparage groups or individuals because of race, religion, sexual orientation, age, or gender....

Councilmembers have the primary responsibility to assure that these guidelines are understood and followed, so that the public can have full confidence in the integrity of their local government. These guidelines are intended to be self-enforcing, thereby requiring an ongoing commitment by Councilmembers to faithfully honor the trust and dignity bestowed upon them as elected leaders and community role models. [From Ferndale Council Rules of Procedures]

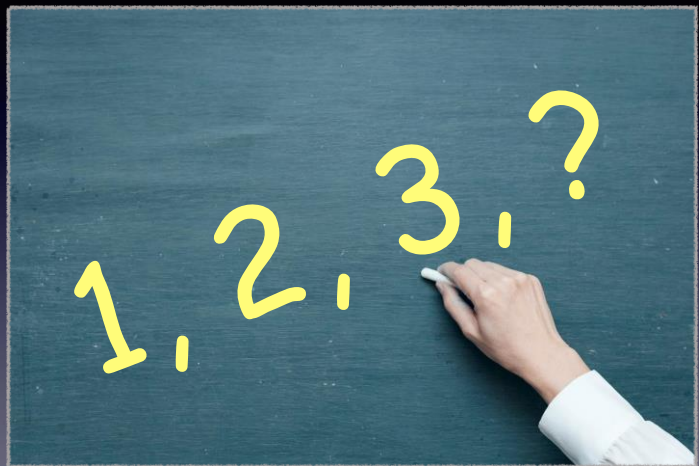
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## Trait #2: Be Able to Count to 4

It comes down to  
this one task:

To get anything  
done you need to  
convince **just three  
other council  
members** to agree  
with you.

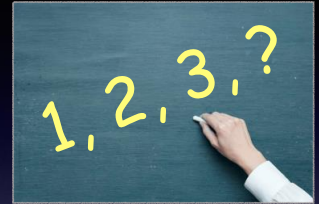


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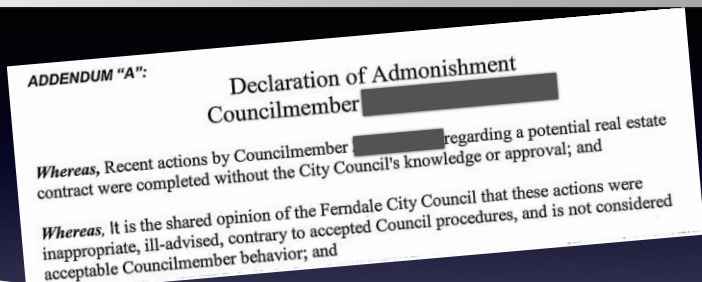
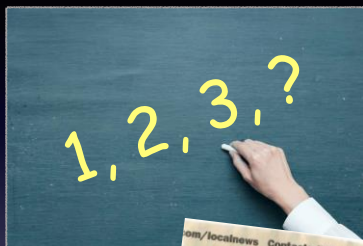
## Trait #2: Be Able to Count to 4



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## Trait #2: Be Able to Count to 4



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## Trait #2: Be Able to Count to 4

You need to know well your fellow council members to be an effective influencer:

- Their pet projects and concerns
- Their biases and values
- Their political philosophy
- Their “hot buttons”
- Their strengths and weaknesses
- What part of your argument will appeal to each member?

NOTE: Don't rely upon party affiliation and labels to always help

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## Trait #3: Know the Rules of the Road



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## Trait #3: Know the Rules of the Road



*The more you know,  
the more effective  
you become. Those  
that know well the  
rules have a  
superior advantage*

The Washington Constitution: Notably, Article 8, Section 11 on “public gifting”

RCW 35 and RCW 35A [Especially 35A.12 and 35A.13]

The Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA)

Public Records Act (Watch those text messages, personal email)

MRSC / AWC Resources: *Mayor and Councilmember Handbook* (most recent edition)

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## Trait #3: Know the Rules of the Road

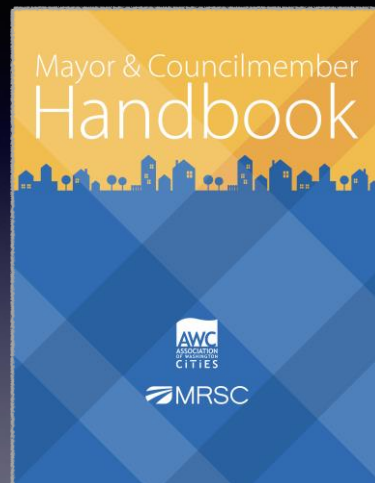
MRSC / AWC Resources: *Mayor and Councilmember Handbook*

Can be found easily online.

Read/study quarterly

Make sure you have current edition.

Frankly, this is pure gold!



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### Trait #3: Know the Rules of the Road

*The more you know,  
the more effective  
you become. Those  
that “know the  
rules” have great  
advantage*



Jurassic Parliament (Ann Macfarlane)/Robert's Rules

Your specific Council Rules/Procedures/Ethics

Your city's Municipal Code

Your city's web site

Your mayor's policies on access to staff

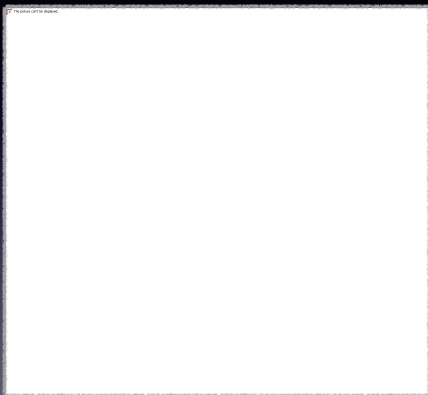
City Attorney

Mentors

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### Trait #4: Don't Be a K.I.A.



**Know  
It  
All**



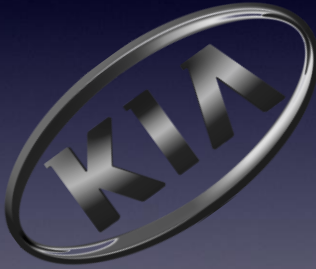
*“Allow me to tell you everything about everything...”*

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## Trait #4: Don't Be a K.I.A.



Be brief, succinct, and accurate. Don't hog the mic.

Okay to say, "I don't know...but I'll find out."

Bragging and gloating don't win votes

Don't embarrass or shame a colleague who may not know something. Don't "Stump the Staff."

It is doubtful your long, personal anecdotes and stories will persuade your fellow council members

No filibustering/grandstanding

Write out your argument and edit ahead of time. Read it.

Sometimes those that say the least accomplish the most

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## Trait #5: Stay in Your Lane



**STAY  
IN  
YOUR  
LANE**



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## Trait #5: Stay in Your Lane

# Separation of Powers



Executive



Mayor (City Manager)

Legislative



Council

Judicial



Courts/Hearings Examiner

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## Trait #5: Stay in Your Lane

### Tips to Council:

- Do not direct or order city staff/employees
- Do not interfere with police/law enforcement
- Follow mayor protocols to access staff for info/help
- With caution, you may avail yourself of City Attorney
- Don't throw staff "under the bus."
- Ask MRSC [They are fantastic!]
- Be comfortable and cautious in the gray zone



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## Trait #5: Stay in Your Lane

“The Council has reviewed an investigation of an employee grievance filed by [STAFF MEMBER] against Councilmember X for discriminatory, harassing and retaliatory behavior.

“The City has an obligation to take appropriate steps to prevent and/or remedy potential discrimination, harassment and/or retaliation, whether the source is a co-worker, supervisor, City official or others. Such behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. I [Mayor Pro-tem] make a motion that the Council determines that Councilmember X engaged in discriminatory, harassing and retaliatory behavior against [STAFF MEMBER] that could constitute a hostile work environment if allowed to continue, and direct staff to draft a public declaration of admonishment for Council to read into the record at the next Council meeting.”

“Councilmember Y seconded the motion. Motion carried 6-1, Councilmember X opposed.” [9/6/2019, Ferndale Council]

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## Trait #6: Be Both a Good Loser & Good Winner (Statesmanship)



You're going to win  
some, and lose some.

Always conduct yourself  
with class, dignity, and  
statesmanship.

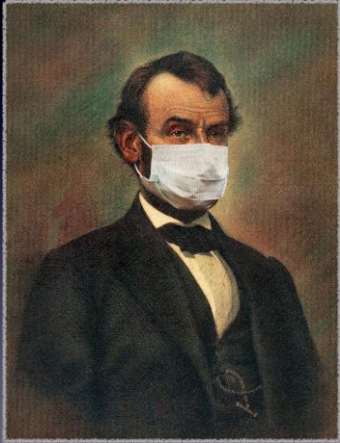
No pouting...or gloating



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**Trait #6:** Be Both a Good Loser & Good Winner (Statesmanship)



“I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends.  
We must not be enemies. Though passion may have  
strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The  
mystic chords of memory, stretching from every  
battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and  
hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the  
chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely  
they will be, by the better angels of our nature

– *President Lincoln, March 4, 1861*

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**Trait #6:** Be Both a Good Loser & Good Winner (Statesmanship)

Always be **gracious**

*What's that look like **in others**? Is that you?*

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## Trait #7: Prepare for Pitchforks and Torches



It will come, so be ready: That “impossible” decision and vote that you know is right and best for your City, but despised and misunderstood by the public; and even by supporters and friends.

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## Trait #7: Prepare for Pitchforks and Torches

*Are you driven by politics...  
or by what's right and best for your city?*



*Some comments about:*

- *Social Media*
- *Polls and surveys*
- *Public Comment*
- *Crowds*
- *“Democracy”*
- *The silent majority*

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## Trait #8: Answer that Email! Pick up the phone!



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## Trait #9: Integrity



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## Trait #9: Integrity

Conflict of interests

Potential conflict of interests

Appearance of Fairness Doctrine

Recusal

Using your position or stature for gain

*Ex parte* conversations/Quasi-judicial hearings

Promises, promises, promises...

Undue influence

Ask MRSC/City Attorney

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## Trait #9: Integrity

Undo Influence: Cringeworthy Videos:

*“Do you know who I am?!?”*

*Misuse of your influence and position*

Search:



“You know who I am?!”: **Congressional candidate Martin Hyde** threatens cop's career during traffic stop

**Port Authority Caren Turner commissioner** confronts police during N.J. traffic stop

**School Board member Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad**: “I’m on the school board”

**Rutgers-Newark Chancellor Nancy Cantor** yells 'I'm the chancellor!' at campus cops in accident dispute

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## Trait #10: Take Care of Yourself

“Today, I am resigning from the Ferndale City Council. While I have tried for more than seven years to support the needs of our residents, it has become painfully obvious I no longer have the ability to affect change as a Councilmember. I also don’t have the energy to continue fighting, knowing I will always be one of two ‘no’ votes on too many important issues where I think the City [Council] is out of sync with the desires of its residents” [Ferndale, April, 2019]

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## Trait #10: Take Care of Yourself

*Health: Body, Mind, Spirit  
Family, Work, Friends, Hobbies*



*Don't let politics become  
too important  
For God's sake, take care  
of yourself*

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## Trait #10: Take Care of Yourself

*Learn from your mistakes*

*Listen to others*

*Don't beat yourself up*

*Family and friends*

*Get feedback ("spotters")*

*Recreation, exercise, spiritual, mental*

*Have boundaries*

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## Trait #10: Take Care of Yourself

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_:

1.Regarding matters related to City of Ferndale business, I direct you to our city web site, CityofFerndale.org. Ferndale does an exceedingly good job at posting nearly all documents related to Council and City business. If you need assistance I would encourage you to speak to the City's communication's officer.

2.Public (non-confidential) matters related to my public service are available in the appropriate places which you are free to access. I am in full compliance with with public disclosure (PDC) requirements for an elected official.

3.Matters of private, family, or personal business nature are just that: private and personal.

There are very few citizens I choose not to meet with. For the time being you are one as I see no benefit for the City or for you in our discussions.

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# The End

Your (brief) tips and ideas to help us do  
our jobs better?

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# Thank you!

**Jon Mutchler**

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