

Making City Hall Work for All:

DANNY'S SIX-POINT PLAN

**for a More Effective,
Responsive, and Accountable
City Government**

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Executive summary

Drawing on over fifteen years of experience as a leader in the public sector, I have a plan to make City Hall work on every level — from core services like tax collection and permitting, to big-picture decisions about how we invest in the future of our city. We can — and must — do better, and here's how we will make it happen when I am Mayor.

Beginning on Day One, I will:

1 Assess leadership and personnel — starting at the top — and make changes where necessary

I will hire top-quality professionals to run City Hall. I will engage directly with department heads regarding key decisions and build trust by communicating openly with employees.

2 Demand transparent decision-making

Leaders across City Hall, myself included, will clearly define issues that need to be addressed and seek insight from experts, partners, and residents. We will share potential strategies with the public before making a decision and communicate those decisions and their impacts clearly.

3 Build a culture of accountability

I will require agencies to publish reader-friendly plans with specific goals and targets to help the public understand how tax dollars are spent and how decisions will impact our communities.

4 Prioritize communication and collaboration

I will be a hands-on Mayor who communicates and collaborates regularly with City Hall, residents, and partners. I will regularly attend City Council meetings. I will lead by listening, meeting with residents and other local leaders to share ideas and hear their concerns.

5 Improve internal services

I will focus on enhancing core functions like Human Resources, Information Technology, Procurement, and Finance by modernizing systems, investing in technology and training, and learning from best practices.

6 Elevate the Office of Performance Management

I will create a Chief Transformation Officer role and strengthen the Office of Performance Management. This office will lead assessments of departments, oversee audit responses, capture and share data with leadership and the public, and make recommendations to improve agency operations.

Making City Hall Work for All



I believe deeply in the power of local government to make a difference in people's lives and to create stronger communities. The people of Richmond deserve a high-performing municipal government that is responsive, efficient, and trustworthy. A government that works for all of us. We can — and must — do better.

I want to be clear – City Hall has many capable and talented employees devoted to public service, and every day our city agencies provide essential services to city residents. From paving roads to helping residents in need to providing quality parks, libraries, and recreational facilities, the work of city government is critically important to the well-being of Richmonders and we are already doing many things well.

The City has also made progress in some important areas – including achieving a AAA bond rating, joining the Virginia Retirement System, and strengthening an outstanding park system.

Too often, however, ineffective and inefficient processes hamper even the best efforts of city employees and cause confusion and distrust with residents and businesses. This is not a criticism of past or present leaders — it's just a statement of fact.

Richmonders need and deserve a government that can perform with accuracy and professionalism. As Mayor, I would draw upon more than a decade of proven, executive-level public sector experience handling and solving complex problems. In my roles at Richmond and Henrico Health Districts, I led alongside elected officials and high-level staff at both City Hall and Henrico County. I led the Richmond & Henrico Health District during the pandemic, led the Commonwealth of Virginia's COVID vaccination effort on behalf of Governor Northam, and have also overseen one of the largest agencies in state government, the Department of Social Services.

I know what works in local government and what doesn't work. I know how to recruit and support talented public sector professionals who do outstanding work. I have partnered with the private and nonprofit sectors to solve difficult problems that government can't tackle alone. And I have the organizational skills, professional relationships, and sheer persistence to get difficult things done, even in difficult circumstances.

I will be a hands-on Mayor. I'm going to take personal responsibility for making sure our government works more effectively. From day one, I will lead our agencies through strategic and sustained action that addresses our most serious shortcomings while also lifting up best practices and a positive vision of public service.

We don't need another study to tell us key processes in City Hall are broken. We need an experienced, capable and dedicated Mayor who can both deliver tangible near-term improvements and provide sustained attention and investment into making City Hall a model public sector organization.

Here's my six-point plan to make that vision a reality.

- Danny

1 Assess leadership and personnel — starting at the top — and make changes where necessary

From day one, I will undertake a comprehensive assessment of leadership and personnel in every city agency, starting at the top and prioritizing the City's most urgent operational issues. That process will begin prior to taking office: In the transition period, I will assess and make decisions concerning key City leadership positions.

In cases where it is clear that there are systemic deficiencies in a given department or other significant leadership issues, I won't hesitate to make immediate changes.

As a hands-on Mayor, I will ensure that all agency portfolios are aligned with my policy goals and that real-time information about issues and challenges at the agency level reach my desk. Under the City Charter, the Chief Administrative Officer holds formal authority over the various agencies, but this should not mean that the Mayor is detached from the work of agencies. I will expect my Chief Administrative Officer to be comfortable with my approach as a hands-on Mayor.

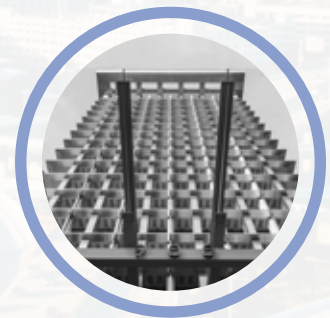
Here are some key questions I will expect all agency leaders to be able to answer in detail, at all times:

- **What are the core goals of your agency? What are the action steps that will achieve those goals?**
- **Who are the people specifically responsible for seeing those action steps are taken?**
- **How will progress be evaluated and assessed, and what process is in place to allow midcourse correction if need be?**

These questions have many important follow-ups, like "How are available resources being utilized to support those goals?", "What is the specific role of each employee in the agency?", "How well do agency employees at all levels understand the mission and why their job is important to the City as a whole?"

I will expect and demand that my agency directors, portfolio heads, and chief administrative officer all be able to answer these questions and implement good government practices — from compliance with legal requirements (such as FOIA requests and procurement law) to sound financial management to sound record keeping to transparent communication with the public.

But I won't just delegate this responsibility to others. I will ask these questions of agency leaders directly. And I won't settle for accepting incomplete or evasive answers. I want to know where the problems, bottlenecks, and challenges are—and I want to make sure that we have a clear plan to resolve them.



Here's the thing: I have 15 years of experience resolving complex problems and getting difficult and important things done in the public sector. I have the skills and experience to work alongside my administrative team and help resolve issues—not just as the elected official in the room but as an experienced public administrator who will command the respect of my team.

I also intend to organize the Mayor's Office to make sure it is not siloed off from the Chief Administrative Officer or from the agencies that formally report to the CAO. The Mayor's Office — either I personally or a member of my team — will participate in regular administrative meetings convened by the CAO or deputy administrators. Problems arise when there is not robust and transparent two-way communication between the Mayor's team and the City's administrators.

My entire professional career has prepared me to be a hands-on Mayor that holds people accountable.

I've been in executive leadership roles for 15 years in local and state government. Every step of that work is making sure the people reporting to you are good leaders, and making sure you have a team that can execute. I believe in building diverse and inclusive teams that reflect the communities we serve and that bring complementary skill sets to the table.

Building a strong culture of success is not something that can happen overnight — it takes time and sustained attention. It's not just about hiring and firing people. It's also about putting in place a robust process to assess leaders, find out what's really going on in departments, and help people see where there is an opportunity to improve. In my administration there will be regular employee engagement surveys in each department, and agency heads will have 360 evaluations on a regular basis. It's hard to be an effective leader if you don't have the trust and respect of your employees, and so I will value employees' voices as well as the voices of other stakeholders.

Sometimes leadership and making progress requires changing how we do things. Change can invite a lot of questions and distrust. When we are doing something new, employees need to hear clearly from the very top why this change—be it a policy, a program, or a procedure—is being made, and have the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns.

One of the challenges in City Hall is making sure that the Mayor's overall vision and agenda reaches all corners of this very large and complex organization, and that all City employees feel they are part of a larger effort to serve city residents. To that end, as Mayor I plan to regularly convene — at least once per quarter — all employees for dialogue and conversation.

Every role across the City of Richmond's local government is important. As chief executive, I want to make sure I am hearing the perspectives of our public-facing staff, and I also want to make sure I am communicating the direction the City is going, so we can all pull together to achieve our goals.

2 Demand transparent decision-making

The Mayor is responsible for making difficult decisions — decisions that can have significant impact on not only broad policy but on real people's lives. Here's the template for decision-making I will follow in City Hall and require all members of my team with significant decision-making power to follow:

- **Clearly define problems or decision points and what's at stake**

- **Gather and assess credible information from within City Hall and beyond**
- **Define and assess multiple possible strategies for action, and obtain stakeholder and broader public feedback on those strategies**
- **Make a timely decision based on available evidence, feedback received, and the best understanding of probable consequences and impact**
- **Communicate that decision widely, and faithfully implement the decision in a timely way**
- **Assess the impact of decisions and policy actions and be open to recalibrating, reconsidering, or even reversing policy actions that aren't working out as intended**



Following these steps consistently will bring clarity to the policy-making process, improve the quality of decisions made, and make it easier to track the long-term impact of policy steps. It will also help both employees within City Hall and the larger public understand the basis for important decisions.

Opening the doors to public feedback is a critical step that, unfortunately, is often overlooked or under-valued. I'm not talking about pro forma, check-the-box meetings to ratify decisions already made. I'm talking about gathering in-depth feedback from a variety of venues and methods.

Importantly, the City must always make the extra effort needed to assure that voices often left out and impacted are included in the decision-making process.

We cannot have a Mayor's Office or a City Hall that is closed off from the larger community. Infact, I believe City Hall is at its most effective when skilled and knowledgeable practitioners work in partnership with engaged residents. Some of Richmond's greatest successes in the past twenty years have come when City Hall has thrown open its doors to invite the public to share in the work of local government—from the Downtown Master Plan under Mayor Wilder to Mayor Jones's anti-poverty work to the Richmond 300 Master Plan under Mayor Stoney.

When we listen to residents, powerful change can take place. I learned this early in my career at the Richmond City Health District, when I helped create community health resource centers within each of the city's "Big Six" public housing communities. Our initial goal was to expand access to family planning services in these neighborhoods, but residents told us there was a broader need for access to basic health services, screenings, and information.

We partnered with Richmond Redevelopment & Housing Authority to designate a vacant apartment unit within each community as a health resource center, then brought in medical staff, and hired neighborhood residents to serve as Community Health Workers. We drew on the talents of community members with strong connections to their neighbors, built trust between the community and the health department, and provided meaningful services to residents. That program is still going strong, and it's making a real impact.

One of the reasons it has made such an impact is that we listened deeply to residents on the front end, honored the knowledge and insight of those with lived experience, tailored our model to that input, and ultimately earned the trust of the community.

We will make this listening-based approach the norm rather than the exception in City Hall.

As Mayor, **I will hold regular listening sessions with residents throughout the city, ensuring all parts of the city are heard, and I will require that city agencies recognize civic engagement not as an add-on but a central part of their mission.**

I know we will not be able to make everyone happy all the time, and I am not afraid to make difficult decisions— I have done so time and again in my career. But I can commit to seeking and hearing multiple viewpoints before making significant decisions, and to clearly communicating the reasons for decisions we make at City Hall. Agree or disagree, when I am Mayor you will always know why a decision was made, and we will always offer an honest, clear-eyed assessment of the results of those decisions.

3 Build a culture of accountability

It's not feasible to transform all City agencies into high-performing agencies at once. That will take time, and we need to start where we can have the most impact. It is feasible, however, to demand accountability from all City agencies from day one.

Every year, City agencies will be required to publish a detailed plan outlining goals with specific numerical targets, personnel needs, and required budgets. I will work with our City Council to assure that each agency is providing a detailed update on its work to a Council committee each calendar year — not just at budget time. And I will publish and publicize these strategic plans so residents can better understand the work of their government.

Here's my approach to accountability. If you work for the City of Richmond, I assume you are motivated by a desire to serve the public. And I assume that you want to be successful in that service, and to be part of accomplishing important things that help the City and its residents.

Positive motivation that speaks to people's deepest aspirations to be effective public servants will always be my "Plan A." I know how to build teams of people that work well together to get things done. I want that to become the norm, not the exception, in City Hall, and I want to recruit leaders who have those same team-building skills.

But there always needs to be a Plan B for when things don't go well. When people consistently fail to pull their weight, repeatedly make avoidable errors, or demonstrate unprofessionalism or negligence in their work duties, they should no longer be part of the organization.

To that end, I will hold "at-will" leaders (such as directors and deputy directors) to the highest standards of professionalism and performance. And I will work proactively to build strong relationships with our public sector collective bargaining units, both to ensure fair and needed protections for employees and to be sure the City can be managed effectively in its day-to-day work.

My administration will follow both the letter and the spirit of the recently negotiated collective bargaining agreements, and will work to improve salaries and working conditions for employees throughout my tenure. My goal is for the City to have a highly motivated workforce that takes pride in serving our residents, with our collective bargaining units as critical partners.



Ultimately, we need to build a culture of success and accountability throughout the organization, so that City employees can trust and rely on one another, and City residents can rely on the City to do what it says it's going to do, and do it well.

That's the mindset I will model as Mayor, and will insist that it becomes the mindset of our organization at every level. "Making Government Work for All of Us" isn't a mantra or slogan for me—it's at the very heart of my professional life.

At the Richmond City Health District, I successfully led a fundamental shift in both the mission and the mindset of that agency. We shifted from an organization that was primarily defined by the delivery of clinical services, to an agency that deeply understood its responsibility to improve the health not just of individuals, but of entire populations. Over several years we built new capacities in data collection and analysis, public health communications, and policy development, and used these tools to address the broader social determinants of health that shape health outcomes at the community level.

We can and will shift the mission and mindset of City Hall too. I'm running for Mayor because I believe deeply in justice, in building a more equitable city, and building stronger neighborhoods. To accomplish those goals we must have a City Hall that functions well, that listens to residents, and that residents trust. This is what Richmond residents expect and deserve.

No other candidate in this race has the extensive record of public sector executive experience that I bring to the table. **I know what it takes to make government work, to lead organizational change, and to truly deliver for residents.**

4 Prioritize communication and collaboration

Change starts at the top.

As Mayor of Richmond, I will unite our community around a shared vision of an inclusive city, supported by the nuts-and-bolts operations of a competent and capable city government that delivers.

I have great respect for the leaders who have held this office since it was created over the past twenty years. But to go further, and especially to go further in the direction of equity, we must do so together.

As Mayor, my priorities will be communication, collaboration, and consensus-building. I'll ensure that every plan the city undertakes is rooted in an inclusive, participatory process. I will model and hold City employees accountable to a higher standard of transparency. I will treat Richmond City Council and Richmond School Board as essential and valued partners in the work of government. I will demand that my staff and the City of Richmond team treat residents and businesses with care and respect at all times and be reliable and accountable.

This doesn't mean I won't stand up for things, and it doesn't mean I won't lead. I'm willing to take bold stands and more important, bold actions, when they are merited. But I also understand it takes extra

work to bring people along when you are doing something different or new. I will respect the doubts, clarifying questions, and even critical questions that come my way when I or my administration propose something new.

I am not running to be a “five vote” mayor who pushes things through a single bloc of Council. While I will not always be able to get every vote on policy initiatives, I will always try. I plan to adopt the City Charter Review Commission’s recommendation of attending City Council meetings once a month to provide an update on the City’s progress and answer public questions from Council members. And I will do everything in my power to maintain cordial, professional, and respectful relationships with all members of Council and indeed all community members.

And when things go wrong, **I will take responsibility**— both for owning what happened, and for working towards resolution.

I understand it takes a lot of patience and extra work to do it this way. But this is who I am, and this is how the role of Mayor and the Mayor’s office can act to unify and elevate our city. I know that I and my team won’t have all the answers all the time, but we will make every effort to listen and provide honest answers. We need the input and wisdom of the members of Council, and that of the broader public as well.

I know this can be done, because I have done it throughout my professional career, over and over, including in high-stakes situations. When Governor Northam entrusted me with the responsibility of distributing life-saving vaccines statewide, I proceeded by building trust with elected officials and community leaders across the state. I showed up in communities and provided information and data about the vaccine, but I also listened to people’s questions and concerns. With that foundation of trust and communication as our starting point, we became one of the most successful states in getting residents vaccinated and finally curbing the pandemic.

I will lead, but not before listening. That’s how we can get better as a City—together.

5 Improve internal services

In my first two years as Mayor, I will focus improvement efforts on the following core functions of the City: Human Resources, Information & Technology, Procurement, and Finance. These agencies need to be well-functioning, well-organized, and appropriately resourced. Problems in these departments impact every agency in City Hall as well as all City residents and businesses.

Nothing is off the table in terms of potential reorganization of these units. But here are some general principles to guide improvement:

- **We need to minimize and eliminate reliance on paper-based records, or even working by hand to make financial transactions. Archaic systems need to be replaced, and we need to assure that new systems are implemented correctly with sufficient training for all employees on the front end.**
- **We need to explore investment in technological tools that would allow us to re-organize some job functions, allowing employees to get more done and eliminating time-intensive, repetitive tasks where feasible.**

- › **We need to prioritize the use of data, including data visualization tools, to guide the reorganization process and the operations of City government in general.**
- › **We need to invest in front-end training of all employees; have a more rigorous assessment process as newly hired employees transition from provisional to permanent status; and have ongoing professional development for all staff within and between agencies.**
- › **We need to be sure our salaries, work climate, and overall professional environment allow the city to be competitive in attracting and keeping highly talented public sector employees.**
- › **We need to draw on best practices from public sector organizations with respect to these key functions, learning from our neighbors in Chesterfield and Henrico County, from state-level practices, and from national examples.**

Building on what we learn in these critically important initial efforts, we will develop a plan for assuring all agencies undergo a thorough assessment by the end of my term of office.

I know what it takes to improve core internal services of government. At the Virginia Department of Social Services, we recognized that our internal procurement process was a major bottleneck, impacting our ability to procure goods and services and to distribute money to various partners. So we looked at the entire process in detail—literally mapping out over 200 steps of the process on a wall in a conference room. Our team wrestled through figuring out which steps were needed and which could be streamlined or removed. We went through this process improvement effort with a fine-toothed comb — our goal was to reduce the length of our complex procurements from approximately 180 days to under 120 day — and we got it done.

We can and will get it done in City Hall, too.

6 Elevate the Office of Performance Management

One of my first actions as Mayor will be to elevate the Office of Performance Management. Currently, this unit is a subset of the Department of Budget and Strategic Planning. Instead, it should report directly to the Mayor and CAO with increased capacity and resources, including the creation of a Chief Transformation Officer role, which will be filled by an experienced public sector leader.

The Office of Performance Management will be expected to:

- › **Assure that uniform, real-time information is being conveyed to senior leadership on the strategic goals and performance of each agency**
- › **Proactively communicate the Administration's overall goals and plans to the agencies**
- › **Monitor agencies' corrective action responses to formal audit findings**
- › **With support from external professional expertise, undertake deep-dive assessments of agencies with recurring issues and make recommendations for possible reorganization and restructuring**

- **Consider organizational issues more broadly, including potential creation of new agencies and consolidation or realignment of existing agencies**
- **Regularly share accessible, meaningful data on agency performance with Council and with the public.**



The work of this office will inform the assessments I and my CAO make of agency leadership and major organizational decisions. I will also meet regularly with agency directors—not just to receive updates, but to ask questions and work through issues as well.

Troubleshooting organizational challenges in the public sector is something I have done my whole career. For instance, in my recent role as Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services, we persistently heard from service providers who relied on our agency to process background checks that delayed processing on our part led to hiring challenges, as many qualified candidates would move on to other opportunities. To address this, we used the People, Process, and Technology framework to assess our operation. We recognized we simply did not have enough human capacity to process the volume of requests we were receiving, so we hired temporary staff to work through the backlog. We analyzed our entire process end-to-end, removed unnecessary steps, and combined other steps to reduce the overall throughput time. And we built a new user-friendly online portal for our service providers to make requests electronically. In 6 months, we were able to reduce background check turnaround times that had taken 6-8 weeks, to under 7 days. It made a world of difference for our providers and their new hires.

Resolving issues like this should not take forever – it just takes attention and a commitment to getting it done.