

May 6, 2026

2026 Evaluation of Concord City Manager Tom Aspell for Public Record

Recently Mayor Champlin notified me that I would not be allowed to participate in any way in the 2025-2026 performance evaluation of the City Manager. This decision was made separately from the full City Council in violation of City Charter #27, and did not allow me to obtain a vote of the full Council on the issue in violation of City Council Rule 6B. The city's explanation of the mayor's action is inconsistent with the City Charter.

Due to what I believe is an unwarranted exclusion from the evaluation process, I prepared a written evaluation for submission to the City Council as a public document and request that it be considered during the full council discussion of this matter. The issues presented in the process of evaluating the City Manager are important to me as a City Councilor and important to Concord residents and taxpayers.

The format I used follows the *ICMA Manager Evaluations Guide* (June 2025) and organizes performance observations around the 14 critical core competencies (Practices for Effective Local Government Management and Leadership). I have grouped the competencies into three categories that highlight patterns of mismanagement: (1) mismanagement of city finances; (2) mismanagement of staff; and (3) mismanagement of city resources, buildings, and parks, including Memorial Field.

1. Mismanagement of City Finances

The ICMA financial competencies include: Financial Management and Budgeting, Strategic Planning, Policy Facilitation and Implementation, Personal and Professional Integrity, and Strategic Leadership.

- The city has experienced persistent budget deficits resulting in tax increases. These increases have occurred even with the use of capital reserves as a revenue stream for operational costs. The improper use of capital reserve funds reduces and hides the actual financial cost of ongoing and embedded operational costs to the taxpayers. Over the past decade, trust funds and capital reserve accounts exceeding **\$5.4 million** were withdrawn in violation of the specific purposes for which those accounts were created. Of this amount **\$2.3 million** was withdrawn from the Recreation Reserve for the vague purpose of "budget."
- The proposed FY 2026 budget included the golf clubhouse while the police station was initially omitted. Both were later bonded together with \$10 million in other previously approved projects. The bonding occurred concurrent with the Concord School District bonding of \$94.5 million and was done without apparent comprehensive debt sequencing or taxpayer impact analysis.
- The City Manager's compensation significantly exceeds salaries of other town and city managers in New Hampshire, and is now approximately three times the median household income in the city (\approx \$84,900). This high salary persists even as taxpayers endure repeated tax increases and strained reserves.

These patterns reflect weak financial oversight, excessive compensation, and reactive rather than strategic fiscal planning. The end result is that Concord taxpayers are now faced with an almost unsustainable tax burden.

2. Mismanagement of Staff

The IMCA employee management competencies include: Staff Effectiveness, Human Resources Management and Workforce Engagement, Personal Resiliency and Development, Strategic Leadership, Communication and Information Sharing, Community Engagement, and Personal and Professional Integrity.

- A city planner with 28 years of experience, widely respected by residents, board members, councilors, and developers, left after her supervisor repeatedly altered her reports. She raised concerns about this directly with the City Manager, who took no action.

- During January’s orientation, the City Manager encouraged disunity on the City Council by not allowing me to speak with any city staff other than himself.
- The City Manager failed to vet an appointee to the zoning board prior to submitting the appointment to City Council. As a result, the Council was required to reconsider and reverse the appointment.
- Developers have publicly stated that the City of Concord is very difficult to do business with due to delays and poor communication.

Communication has been inconsistent. Unaddressed staff concerns and restricted information flow have damaged morale, institutional knowledge, and collaborative governance. These actions demonstrate poor support for professional staff, inadequate retention efforts, and leadership that divides rather than unifies the Council and staff.

3. Mismanagement of City Resources, Buildings, and Parks, including Memorial Field

The IMCA resource management category includes: Equity and Inclusion; Community and Resident Service; Service Delivery; Community Engagement; Policy Facilitation and Implementation; and Integrity and Strategic Planning.

- The golf course clubhouse and irrigation system were fast-forwarded in the budget process and prioritized ahead of other projects that serve the community more broadly, such as Memorial Field improvements. The final clubhouse design was advanced without incorporating public opinion.
- Keach Park — the only municipal park in the least affluent, most racially diverse, and most densely populated area of Concord — faced strict “no-profit” emphasis during discussions about new, long-awaited field lights. Meanwhile, the New Hampshire Golf Association was given free use of the municipal golf course for its own profit-generating tournaments.
- Over 255 mature pines and other trees were cut at Memorial Field without competitive bids. The city claimed abutters requested the removal, but Right-to-Know request documents show they did not. The project devastated the area, transforming what was once a green oasis into a wasteland of broken branches, debris, and stumps. Neighbors were surprised and angered due to the lack of any meaningful consultation.
- Development policies under this administration have been described as anti-housing and bureaucratic. The former city planner who resigned said that City Hall stifles growth.

These decisions reflect inequitable, inconsistent, and non-transparent management of public assets, prioritizing select recreational interests over broad community needs and resident input.

Overall Assessment and Recommendation

Across the 14 ICMA core competencies, the City Manager has failed to demonstrate good financial stewardship, staff management, and resource oversight. His mismanagement of city finances, staff, and resources has resulted in higher taxes, loss of experienced staff, council tensions, inequitable treatment of neighborhoods and public spaces, and reduced public trust.

I submit this evaluation for the public record. The problems resulting from mismanagement are serious and directly concern Concord residents and taxpayers. Our tax burden is not sustainable and will not improve unless and until the issues underlying it and contributing to it are addressed.

Respectfully,



Stacey Brown
City Councilor, Ward 5