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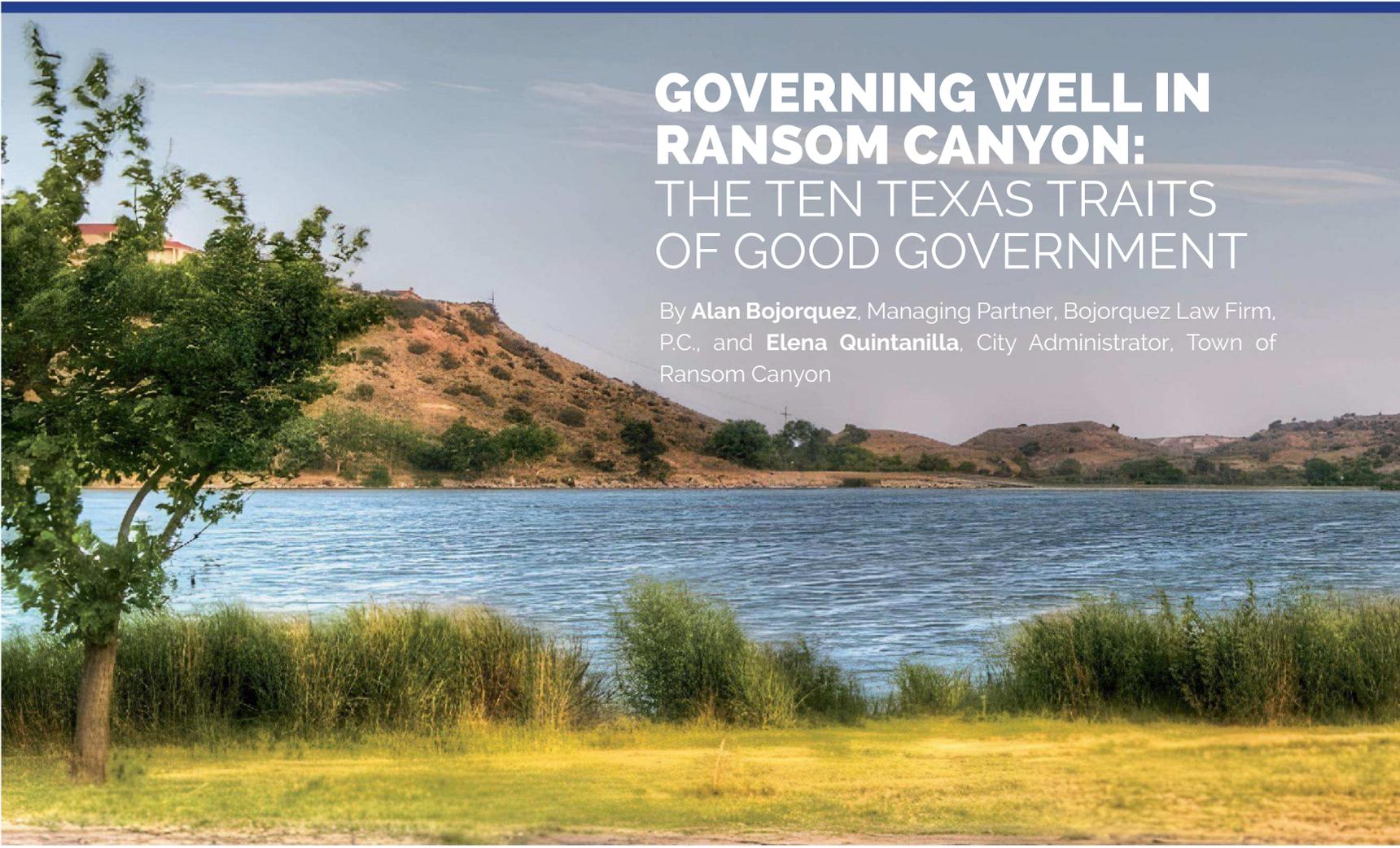
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**STRATEGIC STARTS:  
PLANNING FOR SUCCESS**



# GOVERNING WELL IN RANSOM CANYON: THE TEN TEXAS TRAITS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

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Every new year is an opportunity for reflection and renewal. For cities, it's a chance to reaffirm their commitment to good governance and set the tone for the months ahead. In July 2025, the Town of Ransom Canyon – a lakeside community of 1,180 – took this step when its City Council unanimously adopted the Ten Texas Traits of Good Government (Ten Traits).

This decision wasn't just symbolic. It was part of the Town's ongoing effort to rebuild trust and strengthen democratic practice at the local level. Later, the Cities of Post and Smyer followed suit. Their adoption shows that communities of every size can embrace good governance principles for a strong foundation.

But what exactly does "good government" look like? Drawing inspiration from international models while tailoring them to Texas realities, the Ten Traits outline clear, practical attributes that local leaders can use as benchmarks for excellence.

## Background

The idea of good governance is not new. In 2008, the Council of Europe introduced the Twelve Principles of Good Democratic Governance, which later became the foundation for the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE), a certification program that has recognized more than 300 cities across 21 countries.

While these principles have provided a clear benchmark for local governments in Europe, efforts to identify comparable standards within the United States revealed a gap. In response, the Ten Traits were developed to offer a practical and comprehensive framework tailored to the unique context of the Lone Star State. Despite variations in governmental structures and functions, these ten traits reflect common characteristics consistently found in high-performing public organizations.

## Ten Traits

For Ransom Canyon, embracing the Ten Traits represents



both a fresh start and a long-term commitment to promoting public trust, guiding ethical conduct, and strengthening city operations. The following ten traits provide a clear framework for how city leaders can uphold these principles in their daily work and interactions with their communities.

### 1. Respectful

People interacting with Texas cities should be treated with fairness, courtesy, and professionalism. City officials should demonstrate civility and decorum in meetings and individual interactions while protecting the public's rights, including the ability to participate in governance. Public criticism can be challenging, but those in public service must welcome dissent and differing viewpoints. Respect also means valuing diverse perspectives and ensuring that residents and stakeholders are engaged proactively and consistently.

In Ransom Canyon, the city council and town leaders are committed to fostering an open and welcoming environment

for resident participation. During council meetings, everyone is given an equal opportunity to be heard. Mayor Val Meixner explains, "We strive to maintain an organized, courteous, and respectful format at every meeting so citizens feel safe to voice concerns and know they are heard. We encourage personal follow-up after each engagement and continue to add forums for two-way communication so residents feel their opinions are important."

### 2. Responsive

Responsiveness means being approachable and meeting reasonable public expectations in a timely way. The best city officials see themselves as public servants, receptive to and considerate of citizen input. While initiatives may originate at city hall, policies and programs must reflect the community's preferences. Successful cities treat customer service as central to governance.

In Ransom Canyon, staff demonstrate empathy and professionalism, which makes the council's role more rewarding. Mayor Pro Tem Vicky Keller notes, "We are fortunate to have a compassionate and dedicated team. Together, we are empowered to make a positive impact on our community. Every member of the city council is committed to representing the residents and ensuring that their voices are heard. Whether you belong to the Property Owner's Association, the Volunteer Fire Department, or city advisory committees, our residents know they can approach the City with concerns. Our council actively engages to resolve issues and advocate for our residents. Following up is always key to responsiveness!"

### 3. Effective

At its core, governing well means getting results. Progress toward public goals must be monitored, prioritized, and reported. Resources should be managed responsibly, and programs regularly evaluated to ensure they serve meaningful objectives. Measuring outcomes should not be about numbers alone, but about aligning services with community priorities.

In Ransom Canyon, staff work closely with the city council to develop a five-year strategic plan, which serves as a living document that is regularly reviewed to track progress. These strategic priorities are also shared with the Capital Improvement Advisory Committee, which meets multiple times a year to gauge the status of capital projects. Staff

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performance evaluations and the budget process assess projects and programs to determine if the City is achieving goals.

#### 4. Transparent

Democratic participation depends on access to the organization's data and decision-making process. Meetings of governmental bodies must be conducted to facilitate public participation. It is the city's responsibility to archive public records and make them available for access. In addition to providing data upon request, cities should proactively inform the public of significant actions. Transparency also requires city officials to remain accessible, even to critics and the media. An emphasis should be placed on sharing factual data with the public without advocacy, bias, or spin. New technology offers exciting opportunities to routinely educate and engage residents.

Councilmember Ronnie Hill emphasizes, "Transparency is a priority. We strive to provide our residents with a governance model that is transparent, responsive, and inclusive. We invite residents to join us in this journey, share feedback, and actively participate in shaping our community's future." Hill has encouraged staff to reinstate a bi-monthly newsletter to keep residents updated on city projects and regulations and supports proactive communication to ensure the public stays informed. In addition, the City uses direct emails, social media, Zoom links for city council meetings, website updates, and newspaper notices to share information with residents. Beyond council meetings, City leaders host community engagement opportunities such as Coffee and Tea with the Mayor and Councilmembers, as well as town halls.

#### 5. Competent

Elections and appointments are not popularity contests – effective governance requires knowledge, skills, and dedication to improvement. As cities face rapidly evolving challenges, the organization's ability to serve the public must continually grow and adapt. A key to this success is ensuring that city officials have access to and actively pursue continuing education.

Councilmember Jim Rose explains, "Councilmembers have diverse proficiencies, perspectives, and priorities. Some focus on reviewing the budget each month, while others emphasize transparency and responsiveness. Working as a

team, we strive to play to our individual strengths." Training remains a top priority for Ransom Canyon leaders.

#### 6. Ethical

Integrity is crucial for the organization, its leadership, and its staff. Effective governing depends on the public's trust, which requires that the public good always comes first. Self-dealing must be restrained, corruption prevented, and personal interests set aside. City officials have a duty to act responsibly and with integrity, placing community needs above those of friends, family, or business associates.

Safeguards should be built into local governments to prevent misconduct, supported by clear rules and procedures for disclosing and avoiding conflicts of interest. Cities can reinforce this culture of integrity by offering regular ethics training and making public commitments to ethical behavior. Above all, officials must not only act properly but also avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

In Ransom Canyon, council members disclose potential conflicts and follow personnel policies emphasizing ethical behavior. "The level of trust a community places in its leaders' ethics forms the foundation for all other relationships," says Councilmember Jim Rose. "Many shortcomings can be forgiven, but the people must believe their leaders are honest. Our city is not only managed with efficiency and competence but also with integrity. This commitment to ethical leadership has begun—and continues—to strengthen trust throughout the community."

#### 7. Lawful

In well-governed cities, authority is exercised in accordance with established law. It is imperative that city officials abide by legal limitations and obligations. City officials are bound by constitutions, statutes, regulations, and court rulings, and local rules must be adopted in accordance with proper procedures. Code enforcement should be consistent and objective.

In Ransom Canyon, the city attorney ensures compliance with all state, federal, and local regulations. "Compliance avoids legal disputes and reinforces democratic principles," explains Councilmember Ronnie Hill. The city attorney interprets the law and provides guidance so that city officials are aware of the legal limitations, mandates, and opportunities. The municipal court judge also works

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with residents, visitors, and property owners to promote compliance and justice.

## 8. Innovative

While traditional methods of governing are valuable, thriving cities embrace innovation. Leaders should explore new tools in law, technology, finance, and management, and foster a culture where creativity is encouraged and rewarded.

In recent years, Ransom Canyon has invested in technology to better protect public information and strengthen cybersecurity. The City has also expanded utility payment options, making the process more convenient through online and phone transactions. In addition, Ransom Canyon hired the Texas Municipal League's financial services team to develop a budget that separates funds into three essential functions—a collaboration that resulted in significant savings.

The City has implemented a phone notification system to deliver timely alerts about emergencies, road closures, and other important updates directly to residents' mobile devices. It has also adopted a Continuity of Operations Plan and is developing disaster recovery plans to strengthen emergency preparedness. In addition, SMART water meters now give residents real-time access to their water usage, allowing them to track consumption hour by hour and quickly identify potential leaks.

## 9. Economical

Fiscal responsibility is central to good governance. Budgets are managed prudently, and resources are handled responsibly, guided by generally accepted accounting principles. City leaders follow standard policies and procedures to ensure consistency and uniformity, while managers oversee contracts and debt to ensure risks are necessary and reasonable. Regularly scheduled public audits track expenses and revenues, with results made available to the public. Financial practices are aligned with long-term objectives, supported by policies designed to ensure sustainability. Efficiency is promoted through the mindful use of available resources.

In Ransom Canyon, being economical means delivering the highest level of customer service and quality of life in a cost-effective manner. Fiscal responsibility ensures the City employs trained, competent staff and provides the

technology and resources they need to perform their jobs efficiently, without deferring maintenance for long periods. Infrastructure and equipment are regularly repaired and maintained, allowing the City to balance costs when it becomes necessary to rehabilitate or replace them.

## 10. Accountable

In municipalities committed to good government, city officials take responsibility for their decisions and actions. Decisions are made public and are subject to scrutiny, and municipal leaders openly acknowledge and reflect on the outcomes of their actions. Procedures and sanctions are in place to address misconduct and irresponsible behavior. When contracting with vendors, agreements ensure that even third-party providers of public services remain publicly accountable.

In Ransom Canyon, the City's actions are subject to public review through multiple mechanisms. Each year, an independent third-party firm audits the City's financial transactions and presents the findings publicly. Additionally, Ransom Canyon remains accountable to local, state, and federal agencies that provide funding, such as grants from Texas Parks and Wildlife.

The City also engages third-party professionals to ensure responsible and compliant operations across multiple areas. Engineers oversee infrastructure projects, safeguarding water systems, sewer facilities, and roadways. Independent plan reviewers verify that all building submissions meet code requirements. An external information technology firm manages Ransom Canyon's digital security, protecting sensitive data for both the City and its residents. Finally, third-party codification services ensure that City ordinances are accurately organized and published.

## Conclusion

The Ten Traits provide cities with a clear standard of excellence. For Texas cities seeking to enhance their performance, these traits can offer a practical blueprint rooted in respect, responsibility, and results.

*The Ten Traits were compiled by Alan Bojorquez with input from Elena Quintanilla, city managers, and Texas public administration professors. ★*