

MINNEAPOLIS CITY COUNCIL APPOINTMENT CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Name: Rachel Sayre

Position Title: Emergency Management Director

Department: Department of Emergency Management

Responses Due to City Clerk: End of Day June 16, 2026

INSTRUCTIONS

The following questionnaire is intended to gather candidate responses for City Council consideration during the appointment process. There are two sections, the first contains questions posed to all appointed candidates, the second are questions more specific to the respective department's scope of work. Section One is broken into 4 categories, each with three questions. Section Two contains 8 department specific questions. Please ensure you respond to each question asked and aim for thorough but concise responses of roughly 1-3 paragraphs per question and the response field will adjust as you type.

Once completed, responses should be submitted to the City Clerk by the return date noted above. Should a question not directly apply to your background, briefly explain why and describe the most relevant analogous experience.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL APPOINTED CITY DEPARTMENT HEADS

1) Vision, Challenges, & Opportunities

- a) Please share what attracted you to this role with the City of Minneapolis?
- b) What do you see as the top challenges and opportunities facing this department?
- c) What are your top three priorities for the department to pursue this term? How have these priorities evolved throughout your previous appointments to this role?

Response

When I applied for the role of Emergency Management Director for the City of Minneapolis in the summer of 2024, I was excited about the opportunities doing this work domestically presented, for the city in which I live. Over the last 21 months in this role, I have been honored to coordinate the City's response to several of the hardest situations we have collectively faced.

Staffing a large-scale emergency response while keeping the critical services of a city running will always be a challenge, but we are already working through system revamping to ensure we're ready for future disasters. By its nature, disaster response requires being comfortable with uncertainty—we never know what disaster is next, and it will never occur precisely as practiced, so the best we can do is to know our systems well and continue to evolve them, and be flexible when the disaster does hit.

My priorities remain to: 1) successfully lead my department to coordinate responses to disasters; 2) significantly expand community preparedness for disasters; and 3) to make Minneapolis the most disaster-ready city in the country.

2) Leadership Style & Management Practices

- a) Describe your leadership style and management philosophy? How do you recognize when staff are engaged and effectively supported?
- b) How do you incorporate continuous improvement into your own management practices, accountability standards, and oversight of senior and mid-level leadership within the department?
- c) As a department leader, how do you promote a workplace culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Response

I practice intentional leadership both during emergencies and normal times by grounding my team and our Emergency Operations Center responses in a professional, respectful, and inclusive environment that is focused on why we are here: to serve our community. I believe in continual learning and growth as a leader, and place importance on clarity of expectations to the team as a manager. I take time to evaluate team morale and effectiveness, and make adjustments as needed.

As a small department of 9, only two of us are supervisors, but I've made standards clear and transparent for everyone on my team since I joined in 2024. Supervisors meet at least every other week with each supervisee, and feedback is a part of each meeting. We have team-wide accountability mechanisms, via team norms and commitments, and through annual whole-team review of our MyMinneapolis scores. I instituted a mechanism called a respectful, inclusive, safe environment plan when I arrived in 2024, which is another way I make clear for the department expectations for all of how we treat each other.

3) Organizational Structure, Staffing, & Budget

- a) How do you evaluate the department's existing organizational structure, staffing, and budget priorities? When areas for change or improvement are identified, how do you implement those changes?
- b) What is the Director's role in management of a department's operational budget? Describe your own approach to budget oversight and how you have adapted to any previous budget challenges.
- c) As a department leader, how do you balance budgetary demands between your non-personnel and personnel budget?

Response

Every year I take my department through a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats process that analyses staffing, budget and priorities as a whole so we can adjust as needed. Direction and adjustments needed are captured in our department's five-year strategy.

I meet each week with my team member who oversees our department budget. Our main budgetary challenge remains the predictability of the federal grant that funds five of my team members, which has required collaboration with other department colleagues to navigate.

4) Collaboration with City Council & City Government

- a) How does this appointed position fit within the City's government structure, including your relationships with the City Council, Mayor, OPS, OCS, and other City departments? Where does direction come from, where do you bring concerns?
- b) What factors do you believe are critical to building and maintaining a productive working relationship with the City Council? Describe your approach and experience communicating on significant issues, responding to Council concerns, and balancing policy direction with your professional judgment on operations.
- c) How can the City Council better support this role and department?

Response

This position reports to the Commissioner of Public Safety. The Commissioner convenes all five Office of Community Safety department leads every week, where we collaborate information and priorities across our departments. This structure reinforces the interconnected nature of the five public safety departments, consistently bringing us together to approach city safety challenges as one public safety team, and a clear path to escalate issues when needed.

I respond to City Council inquiries when received, and have proactively met with City Council members both on multiple preparedness plans over the last 21 months, as well as provided briefings during large-scale emergencies.

The National Incident Management System training I provided to City Council in the summer of 2025 on the City Council role in a large-scale emergency came out to small-group meetings I had with City Council members. City Council support on reinforcing our ability to continue practicing and adhering as a whole government to large-scale emergencies remains critical.

DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- 1) How have the City's Emergency Management capabilities and capacity evolved since 2020?

Response

The City invest in a NIMS reset that was completed before I arrived in October 2024, but since then we have experienced two major large-scale emergencies that have demonstrated how our collective capabilities have grown. My department has consistently heard from community members that there was a "night and day" difference in the City's response to 2020 and, for example, the response to the Aug. 27 tragedy at Annunciation in 2025 and Operation Metro Surge this year.

- 2) What is the implementation status of the [National Incident Management System Reset](#) plan? Are there any areas behind schedule or requiring additional support?

Response

This plan was completed before I arrived in October 2024, and a report on the completion of the reset was delivered to the City Council in Nov. 2024 ([National Incident Management System Reset Report](#)). Since then, we have focused on NIMS maintenance—ensuring that our response systems continue to mature and evolve with lessons learned and best practices. We have built regular trainings and exercises into our department's core expectations and processes, and continually drill and build on our systems.

- 3) Are there any new areas identified by Emergency Management where the City can strengthen its response and coordination abilities?

Response

Over the next four years, we will be working to knit together the many components of our whole community's ecosystem of response: mutual aid, nonprofits, faith groups, foundations and jurisdictional partners. We all have a role in disaster response, and the more we can collaborate and know each other in non-disaster times, the better we will be collectively prepared for when the next one does strike. To do this, we are focusing on bringing together stakeholders, building systems and ramping up outreach.

- 4) What programming does Emergency Management currently provide to residents as part of its preventative measures work?

Response

- 1) Ready Camp: family preparedness for disasters course.
- 2) Ready Together: Pilot launching later in 2026 that will be open to community organizations, walking them through the same risk assessment and planning process we use as a City, to better help them prepare for disasters.
- 3) Community Engagement: We table at community events to provide information and resources for emergency preparedness.

- 5) How has the [Emergency Operations Plan](#) evolved under your leadership and the new government structure?

Response

The Emergency Operations Plan remains a core guiding document for our City, and it is maintained by my department. When the Emergency Operations Plan comes into use, we follow National Incident Management System protocols, which are separate from the standard City structure. We are currently working on a revamp of the Emergency Operations Plan, meeting with other jurisdictions to determine the latest best practices on formatting and use, so that we can make our own EOP more immediately easy to reference when needed.

- 6) How have partnership, or collaborative, efforts of Emergency Management been impacted by changes at the Federal level? What is your approach adapting to this changing and often unpredictable landscape?

Response

Disaster response is and has always been a local responsibility; however, federal funding has for decades provided the financial means for local jurisdictions to staff and respond adequately. With government shutdowns and unpredictability in federal funding, we have worked closely with our neighboring jurisdictions on ensuring institutional memory and training remains.

- 7) Describe how you manage the challenge of balancing Emergency Management's prevention and preparedness efforts with the requirements of response and recovery programming.

Response

Thankfully, most of the time for the City of Minneapolis, our work is preparedness activities. Preparedness efforts save lives and money during responses, so this is the right focus. Since last fall, my department now also coordinates two active recovery programs, one related to the August 27, 2025, mass violence at Annunciation and the other related to Operation Metro Surge. Every week my team meets to discuss all of our workload, and we rebalance as needed—and we consistently draw on the incredible colleagues from around the city

government, who are critical as they hold the programs many recovery efforts rely on, absent federal financial assistance.

- 8) In addition to what you have already shared - can you identify an area of success and an area that has been challenging for Emergency Management that you believe are important for the City Council to recognize?

Response

My team has revamped Ready Camp to make it more accessible and to better reach those in our city who have been historically left out of preparedness efforts. I'm incredibly proud of the work we've done to reach out to our communities for preparedness.

One of the greatest challenges over the last year has been the strain of operating Emergency Operations Centers for three of six months from the fall through early 2026. For a small department of nine people, we don't have capacity to rotate – we need all of us, all in, when disaster strikes. My team has done an incredible job of coordinating the responses, working all-out for incredibly long days with no overtime compensation, but this work takes a toll on us as emergency management staff, and to have two very challenging responses back-to-back is even more difficult. It's important to recognize this toll on our team and workload, which includes always meaning our "normal day work" gets put on hold so we can run the emergency response.