



MLGMA

<http://www.mlgma.org>

**Michigan
Local Government
Management Association**

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July 2010

President's Update

Alan G. Vanderberg, Administrator, Ottawa County

Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe but the Summer Conference is just around the corner. Co-Chairs Mitch Deisch and Ben Bifoss and the Summer Conference Committee have put together an excellent program that includes thought provoking professional sessions and excellent individual and family recreational opportunities. The Conference begins on July 27 at Crystal Mountain. Register soon so you won't miss out on this special time to learn, fellowship and recreate together.

The Board of Directors approved the ICMA Affiliation Agreement at our last meeting and will be reviewing the affiliation agreement with the MML in upcoming months.

ICMA recently announced the launch of the "Knowledge Network" which is a cooperative effort with the Alliance for Innovation. The Knowledge Network contains information on a variety of topics and is fully integrated to allow communication between managers and others on subject matter and hot topics. To access the "Knowledge Network" log onto www.icma.org and click onto the "Knowledge Center."

I recently asked committee chairs for updates related to moving the strategic plan forward and am impressed with the progress made so far this year. More on this later.....

Daryl Delabbio, Kent County Administrator, Barb Van Duren, Deputy City Manager of Wyoming and I presented a panel discussion at the Teaching PA Conference in Grand Rapids recently. The Teaching PA Conference is attended primarily by academics from universities throughout the Midwest. Daryl, Barb and I all teach at the college level and presented a program titled "What Students Need To Know: A View From The Pracademic." The session went well and the participants voted later in the conference to hold similar sessions at future conferences.

Have an excellent Fourth of July holiday and I will look forward to seeing you at Crystal Mountain!

Best Regards,
Al Vanderberg

The Council-Manager Relationship

By the MLGMA Recruitment Committee, portions reproduced with permission from *Public Management* magazine

The Council-Manager relationship is a critical part of all City Management positions, and can often be difficult to gauge accurately. This article reprints a set of checklists from the September 1999 issue of *Public Management* magazine published by ICMA. Originally entitled "Warning Signs and Strategies: When the C-M Relationship is in Trouble", the lists help managers identify when trouble may be brewing in the Council-Manager relationship and suggests some ways to help keep good relationships strong and improve those in trouble.

Take Heed

Below are checklists of some of these warning signs and some strategies to use to improve council-manager relationships. This information is not all-inclusive, but the submissions came to ICMA directly from local government officials. Both elected and appointed officials probably have noted other warning signs and developed other coping strategies. When reviewing these checklists, think about your own situation. Also, begin to think about how you can develop strategies to overcome problems.

INFORMATION FLOW: Information flow is vital. Information should be clear, consistent, and available to the chief appointed official and all elected officials (also referred to here as the council or council members). Among the warning signs:

- Communication stops: elected and appointed officials stop calling or talking to each other.
- Elected and appointed officials are not spending enough time together.
- Appointed or elected officials complain that the other party is not keeping them informed.
- Neither elected nor appointed officials feel that they are getting the information they need.
- Some elected officials are getting information that others are not getting.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS: Healthy interpersonal communication is the backbone of a good relationship.

Among the warning signs:

- The appointed official and professional staff find themselves badmouthing council members, and vice versa.
- Appointed and elected officials do not make eye contact with each other.
- Appointed and elected officials do not say hello to each other.
- Elected officials stop talking when the appointed official enters the room.
- The council begins to conduct meetings off-site without the appointed official.

DISSENT WITHIN THE COUNCIL: When council members do not work well together, the community and the chief appointed official feel the impact. Among the warning signs:

- The council does not speak with one voice, thereby causing confusion among the professional staff about policy direction and priorities.
- Councils begin to resist making the hard decisions because a high level of frustration has come to characterize their working relationships.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: It is hard for appointed officials to assess their own performance levels unless they have performance reviews. Appointed officials should be cautious if the council or board does not formally review their performance. Among the warning signs:

- The council does not want to give the appointed official a performance review.
- The appointed official does not want to receive a performance review.

PROGRAM SERVICE AND/OR DELIVERY: Sometimes, trouble brews over how services and programs are designed, delivered, and evaluated via the budget and other processes. Among the warning signs:

- Council members are not satisfied with department directors, and this situation remains unresolved. In such cases, the appointed official is the one who is held accountable.
- The appointed official does not have a clearly defined performance measurement process by which to judge program success.
- The appointed official begins to hear the statement "Everything will be okay in the future."
- The council says, "The appointed officials can always find the money."

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE: If both parties do not have confidence in each other's abilities, they can accomplish very little. Among the warning signs:

Please E-mail
Articles of Interest
for the
Manager to
Curtis Holt at
holtc@wyoming
mi.gov

(Council-Manager Relationship continued)

- The council begins to meet in small groups.
- There is a lack of trust between the elected and appointed officials.
- The council is not accepting the appointed official's recommendations.
- Council members stop defending the appointed official and professional staff in the face of criticism.
- Council members openly and publicly (and on more than one occasion) criticize the appointed official during a public meeting or in the press, and vice versa.

MORE WARNING SIGNS FOR AT-RISK JOBS

The list below provides additional turnover factors that exist in your city or county, with your elected officials, and in your job. The more factors you check, the higher your risk for termination by the council. Note that the risk is related to the magnitude of the factor. Also, several factors with low magnitude might equal one factor with a high magnitude.

| Factors of Job Risk | Magnitude of Turnover Risk | | | |
|---|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| | Low | | | High |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between Council Members | Infrequent | | | On-going |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between Manager and Council | Infrequent | | | On-going |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between Manager's roles and Council's roles | Infrequent | | | On-going |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict within the community | Infrequent | | | On-going |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Partisan conflict | Infrequent | | | On-going |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elected Mayor | Supported by Council | | | No Council support |
| | Initiates good policy | | | Initiates bad policy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Council turnover | New members have no agenda | | | New members have an agenda |
| <input type="checkbox"/> City Managerial years of experience | High | | | Low |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High number of Managerial positions previously held | Without employment agreement | | | With employment agreement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manager holds MPA degree | Yes | | | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manager possesses bargaining skills | Yes | | | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manager possesses collaborative management skills | Yes | | | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Per capita income of the community is low | Yes | | | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economy | Has little effect on turnover. Bad economic news is high risk in the short run. Good economic news increases tenure in the long run. | | | |

Figure 1. Checklist of Managers' Turnover Factors. Adapted from "Causes of Manager Turnover," by J. Thurmond, 2009, *Public Management*, Vol. 91, Issue 8, p. xx. Copyright 2009 by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). Adapted with permission.

Take Steps

Listed in this section are strategies that you can try to improve the relationship between elected and appointed officials. Like the list above, this one is not comprehensive, and you may already have your own strategies for improvement.

INFORMATION FLOW: These techniques may help local government officials enhance the flow of information. Although a few of these suggestions seem to be written specifically for only one type of local government official, they should be read more broadly to apply to both elected and appointed officials. Improving the information flow also should help reduce dissent on the council.

- Learn about how others prefer to communicate, and shape your messages accordingly. For example, some people prefer to hear facts and details first, the big picture second; others prefer the opposite.
- Do not replace personal contact with technology.
- Keep the communication lines open: make time for one-on-one meetings between the appointed official and each council member (if allowed by law); go out to lunch together; evaluate each other's performance and that of the community.
- Contact each councilmember every day.
- Conduct periodic retreats. Use these opportunities to discuss information' flow and to make sure that all parties are satisfied.
- Do not use a lot of jargon when you communicate.

(Council-Manager Relationship continued)

- Try to give the right amount of information at the right time.
- Discuss what kind of information the other party would like to receive, in terms, e.g., of format and level of detail.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: Here are approaches that will help you build and maintain healthy relationships. A number of them involve getting to know individuals. A word of caution about this: not everyone should become a best friend. By appreciating what is important to individuals and understanding their perspectives, you will be able to improve your communications as well as your work relationships.

- Get to know the elected and appointed officials: their interests, children, hobbies, etc.
- Try to understand the elected and appointed officials' roles from their own perspectives.
- Analyze the situation; replay in your mind both the positive and the negative interactions to determine how you can improve your relations.
- Maintain a sense of humor.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS: Elected and appointed officials should look for ways to assess the appointed official's progress. This assessment will require communities to have clear goals and objectives, which can form the bases of the performance review.

In some communities, open-meeting laws make the review process difficult because all contact must be public. In other communities, elected officials can deal with personnel issues privately. While performance reviews, private or public, are not easy, they are the appointed official's protection against surprises and a way to turn around any difficulties.

- Ask the council to assess your performance on a regular basis.
- Conduct 360-degree (i.e., multi-rater) reviews.
- Agree on an evaluation format that also gives feedback to elected officials.

PROGRAM SERVICE AND/OR DELIVERY: These approaches pertain to working collaboratively to design policy and develop the means to implement it.

- Engage in strategic and advanced planning. Plans will become the vehicles for evaluating the performances of elected and appointed officials in achieving community goals.
- Structure processes so that the council or board focuses on the big-picture policy items and not on the day-to-day operations. One way to do this is through the budget process: highlight the important things so that council members can focus on them.
- Connect with community groups: schools, religious institutions, and service organizations.
- Develop a method to educate newly elected and appointed officials about the complexities of governing in the community.
- Make certain that all elected and appointed officials understand administrative procedures and processes.

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE: Many officials report that it is difficult to repair a relationship when there is a loss of confidence. Here are strategies that address this issue.

- Be honest with each other. If there is a problem, discuss it.
- Work collaboratively to repair a broken relationship.
- Involve a neutral third party to help you repair a broken relationship.

MLGMA at National Teaching Public Administration Conference

By Daryl Delabbio, Kent County

The MLGMA was represented at the national Teaching Public Administration Conference held on May 15-17, 2010. Approximately 40 professors from various parts of the country participated in the conference, held at the Grand Valley State University, Eberhard Center in downtown Grand Rapids. President Al Vanderberg (County Administrator, Ottawa County) was joined by Barb VanDuren (Deputy City Manager, Wyoming) and Daryl Delabbio (County Administrator, Kent County) in a panel presentation and discussion designed to acquaint attendees with the core competencies that employers are looking for in public administration students. The session, *What Students Need to Know: A View from the 'Pracademic,'* provided different perspectives about how to train future leaders and what skills are needed to successfully survive in the workforce. The panel also provided information about various resources and networking opportunities available for college and university programs to assist in the development of future leaders.

While the turnout was not large at the breakout session, the attendees did engage in lively discussions about the need to preserve the "tradition" of public administration, while acknowledging that it is important to provide skill sets such as

(MLGMA at NTPA Conference continued)

communications, budgeting and finance, leadership, and strategic planning. Each presenter offered his or her unique take on engaging students, from providing an interview “tip of the week” to making the concepts outlined in a textbook “real” or “personal” to students through the use of local media and storytelling, as well as the use of films, outside speakers, and experiential learning activities such as interviewing leaders and internships (including contacting state associations about internship programs and funding) to augment the textbook and traditional lecturing.

Dr. Diane Kimoto, a Professor of Public Administration at Grand Valley State University and the “TPA” Conference Chair, stated the following about the panel presentation: “I would like to share with you just how valuable attendees considered your session. During our business meeting, it was recommended that at each subsequent TPAC conference, that a plenary be designated for ‘Pracademics.’”

To Do or Not To Do a Constitutional Convention

By Pete Auger, Auburn Hills; Steve Brock, Farmington Hills and Roger Fraser, Ann Arbor

In 54 AD Nero became emperor of the Roman Empire. For a period the empire enjoyed sound government (with the assistance and guidance of Burrus and Seneca). The turning point seemed to have come largely through Nero’s inherent lust and lack of self-control.

In about July of 64 AD, the Great Fire ravaged Rome for six days. This is when Nero was famously said to have “fiddled while Rome burned”. This is obviously a more recent expression because in 64 AD Romans didn’t know the fiddle. The medieval fiddle emerged in about the 10th-century in Europe.

For us, the question may be, “Are the leaders of Michigan “fiddling” while our State “burns”? If so, what should we as city managers do about it?

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to explore aspects of the proposed Constitutional Convention (a.k.a. Con-Con) as it relates to managing municipal governments. The issue is so complex and multi-faceted that not all aspects are identified here. While certainly a political matter, it is also a major practical matter. This report attempts to focus only on the components that effect municipal management.

MAIN ISSUE

The last Con-Con was held in the early 1960s with the resulting product the voter approved Constitution that now governs the State. There have been some voter-approved amendments since 1963 (Headlee Amendment, Prop A etc.). The Constitution can only be changed by a vote of the people through a ballot question or through a Con-Con. The current Constitution automatically provides for a vote of the people every 16 years on whether or not to hold a Con-Con. The two public votes since 1963 have failed. The notion is unnerving to some in that the entire constitution is on the table for consideration through a Con-Con. Some of the pros and cons are discussed in the next section.

The main issue(s) before us as MLGMA is whether to weigh in on the matter and if so, how?

PROS and CONS

Pros

Public management is what we do for a living. Running a community is a large responsibility as we deal with laws, regulations, mandates and significant community needs on a daily basis. Thus we are in a unique position to offer informed perspectives regarding balanced government operations, budgeting and sound public value. No one else can explain as a manager can, the impacts of the State’s dysfunction on our local communities.

Many components of the current constitution are either broken or badly outdated and don’t fit the today or tomorrow of Michigan. The tax structure is geared toward a manufacturing economy. That part of Michigan’s economy has become smaller and may shrink going forward despite the many efforts that have been made to stimulate growth in manufacturing. Court funding is an inequitable mess that creates significant drain on some cities budget, but not on others. Funding formulas for roads, schools, and many other needs are out of whack. The means to affect some change currently exists with the Legislature and Governor, but with all due respect, they (and likely the next group elected in November) are too politically disabled to make the significant changes needed now. The Con-Con, with its own political and practical concerns, is the only likely vehicle to make these changes. In the absence of a Con-Con, the State probably remains locked into a Constitution that does not serve us well today and will not be any more useful into the future. While most people seem to agree on this point, there appears to be no consensus about how to move us forward.

(To Do or Not To Do A Constitutional Convention continued)

Cons

The most obvious and frequently stated con is, "Opening up the whole Constitution is just too scary!" The principal concern seems to be in the unknown. There is no way to predict who would be elected to the Con-Con and, given the current persuasive powers of narrowly focused special interests, some fear a Con-Con could make things worse. There is also the talk of "out of state" money coming in to influence particular issues at the expense of a more generalized approach to framing an enduring constitution. There's the concern that the conventioners would not be able to reach consensus on what should be changed or included in a new constitution. A related concern is what if the public voted down the recommended "new" constitution? There is a cost associated with the Con-Con. Estimates vary, but \$30-50 million is not out of the question.

Ethics

Some in our association are concerned that city manager involvement in an issue such as the Con-Con may be an ethical issue, per ICMA guidelines. To address that concern, the authors contacted Martha Perego, ICMA Ethics Advisor. In the attachment to this report is an email we received from Martha, as well as ICMA guidance to our colleagues in California in 2010 and 2004 on a similar issue. The essence of Martha's counsel is that city manager advocacy on issues such as Con-Con is not in conflict with ICMA ethics standards.

NEXT STEPS

The MLGMA Board should first decide whether it wants to weigh in. A next step might be a session at the Summer Workshop that somehow surveys the members (maybe this should be more direct to all such as a Newsletter poll etc.) on their thoughts. This may even rise to the level of a total membership vote.

If we get through all of that, take a position, hopefully pro, and Con-Con passes, then we need to work on the detail of what we believe should be changed and how we might plan to get that accomplished. That likely includes a position paper developed through the Board and a Committee or two. However, it also appears that our members cannot run for the partisan seats of Con-Con conventioners. No easy tasks, to be sure, but we are left with only bad choices otherwise.

CONCLUSION

This is a BIG HAIRY DEAL! Steve Brock reports: I was on the then MCMA Board when the last big state-wide vote on local control was in the mix. We struggled with what to do then, as well. If things seemed grave then, I don't know of a word to describe things now. This opportunity is not at all likely to come around again until 16 years from now. The larger question is, "Can Michigan wait?"

Are we at a similar crossroad in Michigan as we think about the challenges of and the unknown results of a constitutional convention?

It's ironic that most City Managers deal with new challenges with unknown results or consequences on a daily basis and yet we are timid to approach this issue of great significance to our own survival of local governance. We have heard from City Managers around the State that Michigan is broken. The broken stuff is too long to list. The question before us now is not what the constitution would look like (a rewrite or just some adjustments) but is should we dare look at the rules that govern the State of Michigan?

So, what would Nero do?

Nero was a man desperate to be popular and therefore looked for scapegoats on whom the fire could be blamed and not focus on the challenges he faced and make tough decisions. This is where he found an obscure new religious sect, the Christians to divert from the real issues of the day.

The question becomes, are we leaving the same rules in place only to be able to point towards Lansing and say its "them" that is the problem why we can't _____ (you get to fill in the blank)?
