

Professional Development for Municipal Councilors

November 24, 2005

Mini Case Studies

- 1) The Town of Bridgeview is comprised of six councilors and a mayor. Elections for municipal office were held three months ago and several new people were elected to Municipal Council for the first time. One such new councillor was Joseph Wanabee who decided to enter municipal politics because he thought that too much money was being unnecessarily spent (read wasted) by the municipal staff. As soon as Joseph was sworn in, he became overwhelmed with the magnitude of his elected role including an overabundance of information as well as a constant stream of requests from citizens. This was all well and good but the real reason why Joseph entered municipal politics was to put a halt to wasteful spending.

One day the chief administrative officer had to leave suddenly on bereavement leave. Joseph thought that this was the ideal opportunity to find out what was really going on at the administrative level. Accordingly he called a meeting of the senior staff for the next morning.

Questions:

Did Joseph act properly?

What are the implications of Joseph's actions?

- 2) You are a Councilor for Prince County. You have been on Council for more than twenty years and have held the job as Warden on three occasions. While you are not currently the Warden, you are nevertheless considered to be the elder statesperson on Council. Indeed given your time on council and the vast number of people that you know, you have been able to get many things accomplished for your residents. Often when a resident calls with a problem, like a fallen tree or a leaky basement, you are able to find the right person in the municipal bureaucracy and get action right away. You are known as a doer and maybe that is why you are continually re-elected.

All had been working pretty well until very recently. Prince County hired a new C.A.O. with a Masters in Public Administration. The new C.A.O. has advised all municipal staff to take direction only from her. Clearly this is going to put a damper on your style and most certainly diminish your capacity to get things done.

Questions:

Did the new C.A.O. behave properly?

What should you do?

- 3) Councilor James has become a recent convert to the new technologies. In particular she has developed a strong liking for e-mail as a preferred method of communication. With her very busy schedule, e-mail allows her to be involved in many more activities and projects than would otherwise be possible. Indeed she sees e-mail as a vehicle for streamlining the work of Council. Rather than taking up the valuable time of Council members with endless discussion and debate, she believes that much of this can be eliminated if the business of Council is conducted electronically. Of course Council would still meet but only for a short time since most of the important decisions would already have been made via e-mail. In essence she is proposing a virtual Council.

Question:

Do you see any problems with Councilor James' proposal?

- 4) Your Director of recreation will be shortly interviewing and selecting placements for your community's summer recreation and public works programs. Councilor Fitzgerald has just dropped by the Director's office to say hello. On leaving the office, he casually mentions that his niece has applied for one of the recreation positions and suggests that she would make an excellent employee, if the municipality decides to hire her.

Question:

Did Councillor Fitzgerald do anything wrong?

- 5) Councillor Bradshaw has worked for a local tire manufacturer for almost fifteen years. During that time he has been assigned tasks of ever increasing responsibility from the production line to shop foreman and now to a junior management position dealing with personnel matters. He is clearly a capable person who has bright future with the tire company. Coincidentally at a recent council meeting the municipal council decided that the municipality ought to develop a personnel policy manual to govern such things as sick leave, vacation entitlement and overtime for municipal employees. Despite previous attempts to develop such a personnel policy manual nothing has been produced to date. Councillor Bradshaw, in part, to jump start the process and in part to showcase his newly acquired talents volunteered to draft the municipality's personnel policies.

Question:

Should the Municipal Council accept Councillor Bradshaw's offer?