"Critical Relationships: Building Blocks and Landmines"

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

George B. Cuff, FCMC
March 9th 2016

Councils have two primary relationships: one with their public; and secondly, with their administration. In this session, George identifies why those two are critical to the success of any municipality. He also describes what he sees as the building blocks to a successful term and conversely what constitutes a landmine and how to avoid making that step!

Introduction to George B. Cuff, FCMC

➢ 37 years of consulting experience; own firm since '84

➢ Consulting largely to senior levels in the public sector

➢ 12 years as Mayor of Spruce Grove, Alberta; former

   President of Alberta Urban Municipalities Association &

   Federation of Canadian Municipalities; received Award

   of Distinction from both

Introduction to George B. Cuff, FCMC

➢ Author: Magazine articles since 1979; three "how

to" books "Cuff's Guide to Municipal Leaders,

Volumes 1-2; Executive Policy Governance; 3 books

of articles "Off the Cuff"; plus 8 top quality videos

➢ Reports for +500 organizations; +500 seminars in all

10 Provinces, 3 territories; some international

Timing!

"Some people can stay longer in an hour than others can in a week."

William Dean Howells, American writer

Why does a Council exist? What is its purpose?

- To be the face and voice of the people

- To communicate their concerns

- To reflect their values

- To identify their priorities

- To gauge what the public would deem to be its policies

Primary Relationships

☐ The public

☐ The administration

Second Tier

☐ Media

☐ Other levels of government

☐ Other municipalities

☐ ABCs

☐ Associations (e.g. SARM)

☐ Other

The Public

Famous quote by Walter Lippman:

"I presume the public interest to be what people would choose if they saw clearly, thought rationally and acted benevolently"

How do you see your public?

- Disinterested

- Too critical

- Too engaged

- Turned off

- Unimportant till election season OR?

- Alert; astute; supportive; engaged; friendly; questioning

How do you see your requirement re: public engagement?

- Regular briefings/newsletters

- Website access/updates

- Access/invitations to Council sessions

- Attendance at their gatherings

- Regular media connections

- Reports, minutes, inquiries

- Waiting for an eruption

"Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress." Mahatma Gandhi, social reformer

"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere as long as the policy you've decided upon is being carried out." Ronald Reagan, 40th U.S. president

The Administration

☐ What is a Council's role vis-à-vis the staff?

- ■ Policy leadership vs detailed directions

- ■ Respectful vs dictatorial

- ■ Professional advisors vs water carriers

- ■ One employee vs all hands in my deck

- ■ Colleagues in a grand enterprise vs friends

How do you see your expectations re: administration

- Place all requests on agenda; wait for direction

- CAO and department heads report to Council

- Council makes all important decisions

- Reeve makes all decisions

- Decisions can be changed regularly; depends who asks

- Waiting for an eruption

Building Blocks: (1)

❑ **Vision & Priorities**

   ❑ Council & management need ownership of goals, objectives and priorities

   ❑ Both parties speak regularly to top priorities; make decisions based on current policies

   ❑ Issues dealt with fairly

Building Blocks: (2)

❑ **Role Statements**

❑ Roles of the key participants (Council, CAO, committees) well defined

❑ Role of the CAO supported; respect for the "one employee" principle

❑ ABCs defined; "committee charters"

Building Blocks: (3)

- **Respect and Trust**

  - Atmosphere of confidence & respect between members of Council and its administration

  - Staff members treated respectfully by Reeve & Councillors

  - All relevant information & advice presented

  - Criticism by Council kept to an in camera setting

Building Blocks: (4)

❑ **Planned Orientation**

   ❑ Plan the orientation for immediately after election or any by-election

   ❑ Place the focus on governance

   ❑ Within first 60 days review legislation, policies, priorities, meetings, protocols, decision-making

Building Blocks: (5)

❑ **Effective Decision-Making**

    ❑ Step-by-step model of decision-making

    ❑ Time for Council reflection

    ❑ Appropriate involvement by the public

    ❑ CAO/management provides clear recommendations on all issues

Building Blocks: (6)

❑ **Public Processes**

  ❑ Clarity of roles re: who speaks on behalf of Council; can individual Councillors communicate with public directly; etc

  ❑ Rules of procedure for delegations

  ❑ Council hears the public before a decision is made

  ❑ Clear policies regarding recruiting to ABCs; hearing their opinions/reports; rotating membership; tenure; clarity of roles

Building Blocks: (7)
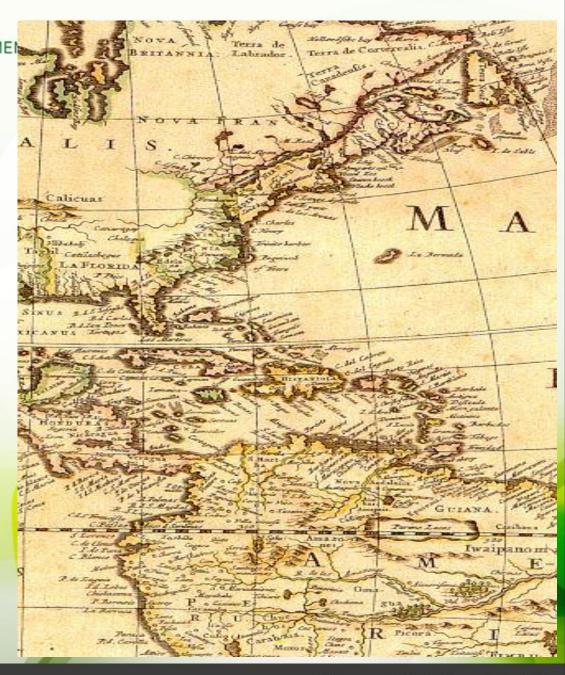
❑ **Communication Practices**

    ❑ Phone calls, letters, e-mails directed to Council & admin responded to promptly; other "correspondence" treated as "interesting" (trial balloons do not stay afloat without air)

    ❑ Public issues treated as important

    ❑ Consistency in response; policies followed

    ❑ Social media policy developed

Achieve What?

If Columbus had turned back, no one would have blamed him. No one would have remembered him either. (Anon)

Landmines!

Challenges & Landmines (1)

➢ Identifying where/how Council truly adds value

➢ Developing a clear course and sticking with it

➢ Keeping up a steady dialogue with your public

➢ Focusing on the issues; not personalities

➢ Ongoing friction between members of the Council on petty issues

➢ Lack of confidence in advice of senior management

➢ Council's focus on management's realm

Challenges & Landmines (2)

➢ No sense of resource requirements

➢ Ethical lines blurred

➢ Council's "agenda" never surfaced; no concept of priorities

➢ Council meetings/gatherings stressful

➢ Lack of trust the tone at the top

➢ Concerns of the public disregarded

➢ Immaturity and/or ethical issues allowed to dominate the good that Council does

Challenges & Landmines (3)

➢ Becoming a power of one; autocratic decision-making style

➢ Allowing a strong, ego-driven Reeve to become both Reeve and CAO

➢ Misunderstanding the need for consensus; relying solely on numerical strength

➢ Personalizing all issues

➢ Refusing to change

Preferred State

Where Do You Fit?

Sir Wilfed Grenfell (1865-1940) a medical missionary to Newfoundland and Labrador once said:

"The service we render to others is really the rent we pay for our room on this earth. It is obvious that man is himself a traveler; that the purpose of this world is not 'to have and to hold' but 'to give and serve.' There can be no other meaning."

Where Do You Fit?

➢ Easy to point out the foibles of others

➢ Communities will stagnate without an infusion of new ideas

➢ Vibrant communities only happen when good people take charge; when the notion of being a pedestrian in life fades; when doing for others is paramount

Vibrant Communities Need (1)

1. Quality thinkers (Council-led) and Managers/planners

    a. Who are not constrained by history

    b. Who are respectful to those who led the way

    c. Who make up for lack of experience through creativity, perseverance, connections

Vibrant Communities Need (2)

2. Councillors & Staff who function as team players

   a. Understand need for integration of resources

   b. Silo mentality dysfunctional

3. Councillors & Managers who are human

   a. Remember that you are dealing with people

   b. People not as impressed by how much you know,
      as how much you care

Vibrant Communities Need (3)

4. Sincere humility

    a. Understand your need to be human

    b. You have your own frailties

    c. Apology is good for the soul

5. Defeats perceived as opportunities

    a. Roadblocks not final

    b. Creative people look for solutions not Kleenex

What does this mean for you?

The Keys!

- Focus on what success should look like

- Address the stuff that derails you; get out of the gutter of petty bickering

- Keep a mental picture of the "public"; what do they expect

- Realize that they do not receive that unless Council & CAO & administration on same page!