

President's column

By Steve Taylor, MCMA President, County Administrator, Sherburne County

What is our job?

After realizing belatedly that my hair was getting a tad unruly, I recently made an appointment at the local Great Clips. An especially inquisitive hairdresser asked where I worked. I told her at the government center in Elk River (I prefer to stay vague because I know what's coming). "Oh," she said, "What do you do there?"

"I am the county administrator," say I.

"A county administrator... what does that mean?"

Have you ever been through that routine, whether it's at a weekend social gathering, on the phone with a mortgage lender, speaking with brothers-in-law, or reuniting with old friends?

Do you say, "Well, I am appointed by the Board of Commissioners under Minnesota Statutes, section 375A.06 and am the administrative head of the county. I am responsible for the administration and direction of all policies, budgets, programs, functions, and staff of county government under the control of the Board of Commissioners. And under subdivision 4 I exercise general supervision over all county institutions and agencies and, with the approval of the county board, coordinate the various activities of the county and unify the management of its affairs. A similar answer could be provided for a city administrator under Minnesota Statutes 412.651."

Or do you say, "Well ... I am like a chief executive officer but called a chief administrative officer."

“How do you explain to others what you do for a living? Maybe it's just easier to say, 'I am simply a humble civil servant,' and leave it at that.”

Or do you say, "I am like Smokey the Bear—I put out fires. I deal with unusual issues like disciplining staff who have cozy relations in data closets, city sewage backups occurring inside a brand new multi-million-dollar license center, or, more commonly, subtly steering an elected official in a different direction to protect them from potential political issues down the line."

Or do you say, "Well ... I am like a plate spinner you find at a circus or Vegas show. I juggle multiple issues, from supporting eleven union negotiations, to building new facilities, to encouraging economic development in our county. I try not to let any of the plates smash to the floor—my goal is to keep them spinning and not add any more unless other plates have been removed."

What I want to say is, "I am many things wrapped into one. I am a part-time psychologist, ethicist, engineer, leader, delegator, motivator, planner, and technologist who sees developing trends (both good and bad) and moves the organization in a direction that benefits the residents in the best possible way."

One last item: I was speaking to 17 new employees at our New Employee Welcome Session (NEWS) recently—I really enjoy this part of the on-boarding process because I get to provide newly minted staff with an overview of county functions. I impart a broad outline of our functions and the importance of the county's governing body. I finish my 20-minute spiel by telling these new employees that as they go about their day-to-day activities and grind out their work, to reflect on the bigger picture—those of us in local government have a unique job.

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We don't produce sneakers, furniture, or cars (not to downplay those products). Rather, we provide a direct service to our residents, whether it's plowing their roads, rescuing children from dangerous family environments, or answering 911 calls.

I look at our job as administrators in a similar fashion. The difference (at least in part) is we are appointed to cohesively bring all of our city/county functions together to meet and advance the policies of our elected officials.

How do you explain to others what you do for a living? Maybe it's just easier to say, "I am simply a humble civil servant," and leave it at that. ☐

Contact Taylor at steve.taylor@co.sherburne.mn.us.

Board meeting recap

The MCMA Board met on Oct. 26 in Edina and on Dec. 14 at the League of Minnesota Cities building. Highlights of the meetings included:

- An introduction to Heather Corcoran, LMC's new manager of member engagement, and the staff member who will assume responsibility as MCMA's next secretariat officer when Kevin Frazell retires later in 2019.
- Approval of a Manager-in-Residence agreement with North Dakota State University for a week-long residency by MCMA member and NDSU graduate Dan Tienter, director of finance, Fridley.
- Review of plans for the 2019 Winter Workshop to be held on Friday, Feb. 1.
- Review and approval of a proposal of the Women in the Profession Task Force to become a permanent standing committee of MCMA.
- A 2019 Annual Conference Planning Committee joint meeting.
- Review and updates made to MCMA's strategic plan. ☐

MCMA Newsletter

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**Your
Senior
Advisors
are here
to help!**

Appointments and other professional news

- **John Tingley**, assistant to the city manager, Robbinsdale, has been appointed city administrator, Tonka Bay.
- **Barry Stock**, city administrator, Savage, has retired.
- **Noah Schuchman**, regulatory services director, Minneapolis, has been appointed chief administrator officer, Duluth.
- **Brian Gramentz**, city manager, New Ulm, has retired.
- **Chris Heineman**, community development director, Northfield, has been appointed city administrator, Little Canada.
- **Melanie Mesko-Lee**, city administrator, Hastings, has been appointed city manager, Burnsville.
- **Walt Fehst**, city manager, Columbia Heights, has retired.
- **Kelli Bourgeois**, assistant city manager, Columbia Heights, has been appointed city manager there.
- **Steve Devich**, city manager, Richfield, has retired.
- **Katie Rodriguez**, Chair, Metropolitan Council Transportation Committee, has been appointed city manager, Richfield.

Get ready for a Winter Workshop like no other

By Dianne Miller, 2nd Vice President, Assistant City Administrator, Eagan

The MCMA Winter Workshop on Feb. 1, 2019 is gearing up to be one of a kind, and you won't want to miss it! You will walk away with tools and insights on how to manage in today's age of political polarization and controversy. As a bonus, all of this content is being packaged into a one-day, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. workshop at the phenomenal Surly Brewing in Minneapolis.

A few of the high points you can expect from the workshop include:

- A keynote address from Hamline Professor David Schultz.
- Three panels of your brave peers who will engage you and provide their perspectives, experiences, and advice as we live and manage in these polarizing times.
- Lessons on how our ICMA Code of Ethics weaves into these conversations as we are joined by ICMA ethics guru, Martha Perego.
- Insights and advice from your colleagues about how to manage community controversies and disagreements between elected officials and/or staff.
- The company of your friends and peers with a menu of awesome food and beverage choices throughout the day.

Go to your calendar right now and put a hold on Friday, Feb. 1. This is a professional development opportunity you want to attend!

For more information and registration visit the website at www.mncma.org.

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Be sure to check out MCMA's website:

www.mncma.org

ICMA 2019: Nashville

By Scott Neal, MCMA First Vice-President, City Manager, City of Edina

One of the burdens/privileges of serving as the first vice-president of the MCMA is that you also represent our fine organization on the ICMA Annual Conference Planning Committee. In that capacity, I traveled to lovely Nashville, Tennessee for three days of conference planning activities Nov. 16-18. The weekend was more work and more fun than I expected. Here's a quick report of what you can look forward to next fall.

The conference will be centered in downtown Nashville at the beautiful, gleaming Nashville Convention Center. How many of you attended the 1993 ICMA Conference in Nashville at the Opryland Resort and Convention Center? I did. That is NOT where we will be in 2019. We will be downtown just a few blocks from the bars on Broadway, the Bridgestone Center, Ryman Auditorium and the great energy of a city on the move.

The Planning Committee focused our work on vetting hundreds of program ideas that fit within our six educational program themes: civic health, equity and inclusion, leadership, innovation, sustainability, and personal issues. I was a member of the Civic Health Program Subcommittee. We reviewed 75 program proposals to fit into 10 program slots: four sixty-minute presentations; three thirty-minute presentations; and, three sixty-minute roundtable discussions. It was the sort of assignment that I think any one of us could have accomplished alone in a couple of hours, but in a group setting of 12-14 members, it took pretty much all day.

Take the work of my program subcommittee and add to it the work product of the other five program subcommittees, plus some great keynote speakers, which we haven't chosen yet, plus some field demonstrations and tours which the host committee is working on right now—and you've got yourself the content of the 2019 ICMA Conference.

Conference content is the most important reason to attend the ICMA Conference, but it's not the only reason. Entertainment and fellowship are important as well, and Nashville's entertainment sector is top notch. For country music fans, this is your town. Everything you want is here. But, for fans of other styles of music, you will be surprised at the depth and breadth of Nashville's live music scene. From a music perspective, I can promise you there is something for everyone.

The 2019 ICMA Conference in Nashville is Oct. 20-23. Late October in Middle Tennessee is perfect weather. It's the best time of year there. Registration opens in June 2019. You'll hear more from me in early 2019 about the conference, but ICMA is expecting record attendance, so get ready and block those October days on your calendars now. It's going to be a fun and informative ICMA Conference in Nashville in 2019! ☐

Contact Neal at sneal@edinamn.gov.

Strategic plan update

At the Oct. 26 meeting, board members Laurie Hokkanen and Dianne Miller led the board through a status review and "tune up" of MCMA's existing strategic plan. The update largely continues existing priorities but does incorporate work already underway in a couple of new areas. The board agreed that the association is strong and working well for its members. Connecting and networking between members is a high priority. The board said they felt that one of the biggest successes in recent years has been the very strong annual conferences.

Identified priorities are:

- Promoting ethics, civility, and civic engagement.
- Supporting online access to information and connection between members.
- Continuing strong support for managers in transition.
- Keeping the Sr. Advisor program strong.
- Professional development and member networking.
- Promoting and supporting members in the ICMA Credentialed Manager program.
- Reaching the next generation—encouraging classroom presentation in K-12 schools on local government and the profession; reaching college students about local government management as a career; and supporting the professional development of those early in the profession.
- Promoting ethnic and gender diversity in the profession. ☐

New and improved MCMA listserv: Welcome to the MCMA MemberLink community!

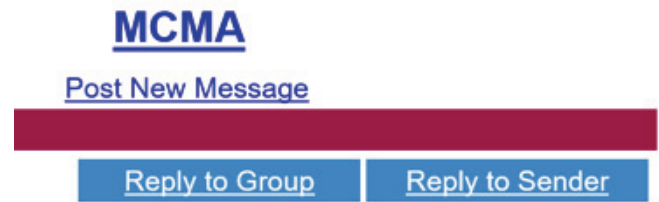
The MCMA listserv is now operating on a new platform that all League of Minnesota Cities listservs use called "MemberLink." It is similar to the former MCMA email listserv, but with some new and improved features, including:

- **Better resource sharing.** Share and search saved documents, such as templates, models, responses to a question, or any attachments sent to the MCMA MemberLink Community
- **Enhanced member profiles.** View the names, photos (if added), and contact information of each person who is on the listserv and email them directly. Thank you to those who have already add contact information and/or a photo to your profile!
- **More choices.** MCMA members were automatically set to receive emails in real-time as discussions are sent to the group. If you'd prefer to get a daily digest instead or to not receive email notifications at all and instead view your discussions by visiting the website, you can change your preferences at <https://memberlink.lmc.org>.

Some important changes that you should be aware of:

- 1) If you simply click "reply" using your own email system to an MCMA listserv email, your reply message will go out to the ENTIRE MCMA group.
- 2) To only reply to the sender, you can click the blue box "reply to sender" (you will have to log into your MyLMC account to complete the reply message).

MyLMC is the same system used for signing up for League events, webinars, or online learning courses. If someone else in your city usually signs you up for these items, setting up your own MyLMC account may take a few extra steps the first time. If you have questions, please call the League at (651) 281-1200. ☐



To only reply to the sender, you can click the blue box "reply to sender."

Introducing Heather Corcoran: MCMA's next secretariat officer

By Kevin Frazell, MCMA Secretariat

As many of you know, I have transitioned to half-time employment with the League of Minnesota Cities and will fully retire later in 2019. One of my favorite responsibilities at the League has been serving as MCMA's secretariat officer since 2000. It has been so gratifying to support all of you as local government professionals, a career that we all know is a calling, not a job.

The League highly values its close relationship with MCMA and is fully committed to continuing to serve MCMA well. Your next secretariat officer will be Heather Corcoran, who has been a League staff member for eight years. Many of you know Heather in her role as member relations coordinator in LMC's intergovernmental relations department. If you have served on one of our legislative policy committees in recent years, you have worked with Heather.

Heather has long had a passion for local government and member relations and was recently promoted to the new role of engagement manager. In this newly created position, she will work with our member cities, affiliate city groups, and business partners to enhance our member outreach and engagement efforts. A major part of that will be to serve as secretariat officer for MCMA! Heather is supervised by deputy executive director (and MCMA member!) Luke Fischer. She earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the College of Saint Benedict.

Heather's looking forward to continuing to work with the wonderful city managers and administrators around the state in this new role (and just might still recruit you to join a policy committee). We have already had many meetings and conversations about MCMA and we will continue working toward a very smooth transition over the coming months. Expect to see Heather at upcoming MCMA events, and take time to introduce yourself and chat. ☐

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Eight seconds

Chad Adams, City Manager, Albert Lea

For all of you rodeo fans out there, the title to this column is a little misleading and may disappoint you due to the synonymous nature of 8 seconds to the sport. Instead of providing an analogy to rodeo, I'm going to pivot (pun intended) and use a recent basketball coaching experience as a reflection on some leadership lessons learned in the moment, in my career, and for our profession.

The situation: My son's fourth grade basketball team is up by two points and the opponent is attempting to score and tie the game underneath their basket when the ball goes out of bounds to our possession. Eight seconds remain on the clock. I call a timeout to make sure we get the ball in bounds and run out the clock to secure the victory. I draw up the play on the whiteboard and discuss every player's role when the ball gets put in play. Watching from the sidelines, I'm proud of how the boys line up in perfect alignment before the ball is put into play. Proud of the timing of each player's movement and execution on getting the ball thrown in to an open player. A split second later I'm bellowing "Noooooooooooo!" as our player with the ball panics (but pivots perfectly towards the basket I must say ... even though it's the opponent's basket) and heaves the ball to the hoop. While he misses, the opponent grabs the rebound, makes the basket and we are going to overtime. Fast forward one minute and 52 seconds later into overtime, and we are in the exact same situation with eight seconds remaining, up by two, and it's our ball under the opponent's hoop.

But first, let me reflect on some leadership lessons. As some background, I've committed myself to life-long learning and have highly valued leadership training whether it be MCMA, ICMA, Blandin Community Leadership Program, or

being engaged in an advanced effective management program with peer colleagues. Here are a few of my favorite words or concepts that have advanced my leadership skills in my career.

Compassion. In the game situation noted above, showing compassion actually came quite easy, as I quickly and calmly explained what happened or went wrong as a learning lesson, but highlighted more of the positive actions that took place. Demonstrating or being viewed as a compassionate leader hasn't come easy in my career. A particular example that comes to mind is my first city administrator role in a small Iowa community, right out of grad school, and only

“We were aggressive, strategic, and communicated well our approach, but lacked compassion and understanding.”

a few months into the job. The community had also just created the city administrator position and the Council wanted some immediate achievements to justify the creation of the position. One of their top priorities was nuisance properties and cleaning up the town. The task was large, as over a quarter of the residential properties were clearly out of compliance. We were aggressive, strategic, and communicated well our approach, but lacked compassion and understanding. This resulted in a petition placed around a few businesses in town to fire me (which fortunately didn't gain much support, and I survived with the Council's backing), but also resulted in a few residents "declaring vigilante justice" while noting "vigilante justice will prevail." This was still pre- 9/11, and such a declaration could bring more serious consequences today. I've been back to the community a few times since leaving and still look over my shoulder, as I'm not sure if the declaration of vigilante justice has ever formally been lifted. Takeaway quote: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." – Dalai Lama

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Clarifying Expectations. While initially thought to be an accomplishment in the game situation, the result was a clear fail upon my part. I thought after the game about what I could have clarified better, but also reflected on my career and present position in Albert Lea and how I can improve on clarifying expectations with our team and community. Clarifying expectations is a constant focus of mine, whether it be in-person conversations or meetings, memos, emails, etc. I've learned that my attention to clarifying expectations has helped significantly in my professional trust-building both short-term and long-term with colleagues, stakeholders, and clients. It also results in executing projects within determined timelines. *In The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M. R. Covey includes a chapter on clarifying expectations that's a great refresher for our profession, but in life as well. In short, Covey writes that clarifying expectations is creating a shared vision and agreement about what is to be done *upfront*. Clarifying expectations is based on the principles of clarity, responsibility, and accountability. In the absence of clarifying expectations, trust and speed will be compromised and employees will become more suspicious of your intent as a leader. Takeaway quote: *"The moment there is suspicion about a person's motives, everything becomes tainted."* – Mahatma Gandhi

“In the absence of clarifying expectations, trust and speed will be compromised and employees will become more suspicious of your intent as a leader.”

Culture of Discipline. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins developed the concept of a “Culture of Discipline.” He notes that it all starts with disciplined people, with the transition beginning by not trying to discipline the wrong people into the right behaviors, but by getting self-disciplined people on the bus in the first place. In the basketball game situation, I could have disciplined the player making the mistake by replacing him with another player in overtime. But, I had the right people on the bus (in the game) and the fail was more about clarifying expectations than a culture of discipline. In my career, I've found that the creation

and use of a management team code of conduct has been instrumental in creating a culture of discipline that has cultivated information flow to the manager, respect and courtesy, integrity, innovative thought, appreciation, pride, planning, collaboration and teamwork. Takeaway quote: *"We find plenty of organizations in history that had tremendous discipline and that marched right into disaster, with precision and nicely formed lines. No, the point is to first get self-disciplined people who engage in very rigorous thinking, who then take disciplined action..."* – Jim Collins

Back to the final 8 seconds. We are back in a timeout and we draw up a new play with new responsibilities for each player. Expectations are more clearly defined, a compassionate approach has led to a light and fun atmosphere in the huddle, and we have the same players in the game (on the bus) to execute the plan. The result is a long pass from under the opponent's hoop down to our end of the floor caught by the player who made the mistake previously in the game, he dribbles the ball until the clock runs out, and we all win. ◻

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