

## The President's Column

By John Mulder, MCMA President, Hermantown City Administrator

This is my last official President's column. I have so much to say, so hopefully, this will sound somewhat coherent.

First of all, I want to say thank you for allowing me to be president last year. I have had leadership roles in other organizations over my career, but this has been the most rewarding by far.

I started my remarks last year by stating that I was proud and humbled to be elected president. It feels odd to be proud and humbled at the same time. Over the last year, I got to know several managers, administrators, and assistants whom I didn't know before and probably wouldn't have gotten to know had I not held this position. Most of them are younger than me, and I must say they are outstanding leaders and do good and important work in their communities. I am humbled by their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

I always score very high on the introvert scale; being in front of a large crowd or having to work a room is not scary, but it can be draining. But for me, the opportunity to serve was invigorating and inspiring. I am so very proud of the work that MN City and County Managers and their assistants are doing around the state to make our communities better places to live.

Second, I would tell you if you

haven't volunteered to be on an MCMA committee or on the board, please give it some thought. You will get to know members of the organization and be inspired by the work of other professionals.

I would also encourage you to be engaged in the organization by attending the conferences, talking to your peers, and even responsibly enjoying a drink with them. In doing so, you will develop friendships. C.S. Lewis said, "Friendship...is born at the moment when one man (or I would correct to say person) says to another 'What! You too? I thought that no one but myself...'" Those friendships or connections will help you gain confidence in your work and yourself and help you listen to the right voices in your head.

**"I believe strongly in the power of government to better our lives and communities, and I have dedicated my entire career to that effort."**

Years ago, when my wife and I had our first child, we gave her a play medical kit, which contained a toy syringe, bandages, a blood pressure cuff, and of course, a stethoscope. As I held it to my daughter's chest, I said, "thump-thump," to mimic the sound of the heart. I would move it to listen to her stomach and say, "gurgle-gurgle," to make sure her stomach was working the way it ought. But, when I held it to her head (I have never seen a medical professional do that), I wondered what sound the head should make. I, of course, wanted it to be something

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of Appointed  
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healthy but also a message that I wanted my infant daughter to hear and believe. So, I held the stethoscope to her head and said, "I'm smart," to mimic the sound of the brain talking.

We all hear the voices in our heads, and sometimes they can be doubts about our ability to lead our organizations. But you can teach your mind to speak positive thoughts, and as I like to say, it is important to preach to yourself. Knowing that other city/county administrators are dealing with the same problems you are can help you remember that you are not alone in your work. There is so much that we can learn from each other, and you might even be able to share what is working for you.

Finally, I believe strongly in the power of government to better our lives and communities, and I have dedicated my entire career to that effort. I also believe success is rarely measured over months and years but rather over a career. It is our commitment to our communities and the code of ethics of our profession that makes our lives and work meaningful. ◻

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## MCMA Board Meeting Recap

*By Madison Hagenau, MCMA Secretariat*

The MCMA Board met on February 3, March 24, and April 26. Highlights of the meetings were:

- Debrief of the 2023 Winter Workshop
- Approval of the appointment of Craig Dawson as the new senior advisor
- Approval of the 2023-2027 Secretariat Agreement with LMC
- Approval of the Fiscal Year 2024 budget
- Final review of the Annual Conference Program

## Reaching the MCMA secretariat

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## MCMA Newsletter

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**Your senior advisors are here to help!**

# 2023 ICMA Conference

By Brad Martens, First Vice President, Shoreview City Manager

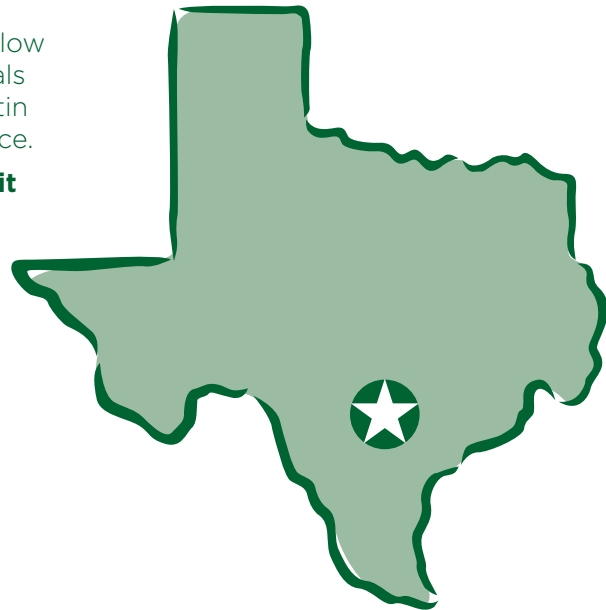
Austin, TX is known as the Live Music Capital of the World and is the perfect location for this year's ICMA Annual Conference. In addition to music and vibrant nightlife, Austin is known for its legendary barbecue, urban hiking trails, incredible public art, renowned public library, and the University of Texas.

I'm excited to share that this year's conference will be exceptional. The host committee is extremely dedicated, the keynote speakers are inspirational, plentiful off-site tour options exist (have you heard of the bat bridge?!), and due to a record number of sessions submitted for consideration, the overall content will be fantastic. I may be biased, but this might be the best ICMA conference yet.

**Save the date for Sept. 30 - Oct. 4, 2023**, and look for more information soon. The weather should be great, and we have a fun dinner planned at the Electric Shuffle on Rainey Street for an incredible social experience with gourmet food and beverage while playing high-tech shuffleboard. Believe me, there's fun for everyone.

Please plan to join your fellow local government professionals from across the world in Austin for this year's ICMA conference.

**For more information, visit [conference.icma.org](https://conference.icma.org).**



Be sure to check out MCMA's website: [mncma.org](https://mncma.org)

## SAVE THE DATE!

**The 2024 Annual Spring Conference will be held at Madden's on Gull Lake, May 1-3, 2024!**

Shortly after wrapping up the 2023 Annual Conference, staff solicited feedback on the venue, and the comments received were overwhelmingly positive. However, there was a clear desire to explore moving the event back to May. After some conversations with Madden's, we secured May 1-3 for our 2024 Annual Conference.

Stay tuned for more information later this fall as conference planning gets underway! ◻

# 2023 MCMA Annual Conference

By Jackie Schulze, Annual Conference Planning Committee Chair, Waconia Assistant City Administrator

It is hard to believe we are well on our way to summer, and the 2023 MCMA Conference is over. We were excited (and a little nervous!) to have our first conference at Madden's and ended up having our highest-attended conference ever. We also welcomed 26 first-time conference attendees.

The conference featured a great slate of speakers, including Nora McInerney, who made us both laugh and cry with her story and reminder that it is OK to not be OK. Personally, hearing our colleagues' anonymous text messages at the end of McInerney's presentation reminded me of the importance and necessity of leaning on our network when times are tough and the need to check in on each other every so often.

Thursday, we welcomed Suri Surinder, who focused on the importance of leaders earning credibility, trust, and respect from coworkers. Surinder was followed by a featured session given by David Schultz, who discussed the increasing polarization of our local politics. That afternoon, we had several excellent break-out sessions and work-life balance activities, followed by the Celebration of Public Service Dinner. Getting to hear from and recognize our colleagues is always a highlight of the conference for me.

Congratulations to our 2022-2023 retirees, and thank you for your many years of service to our profession. Thank you to our colleagues, **Melinda Coleman**, **Logan Martin**, and **Brian Heck**, who shared their stories during our Treasured Chronicle event. And last, congratulations to our award winners:

- **Dave Callister, Plymouth**.....**Dr. Robert A. Barrett Award for Management Excellence;**
- **Allyn Kuennen, Lakeville**.....**Outstanding Service Award;**
- **Sabrina Hille, Otsego**.....**Aaron Sather Emerging Leaders Award; and**
- **Noah Schuchman, Duluth**.....**President's Award.**

On Friday, we had an ICMA Update from ICMA Midwest Vice President Mike Sable followed by remarks from MCMA President Brad Martens on his ICMA Credentialing initiative. We also had a very interesting presentation from John Barry, who shared his experience on the Columbia Accident Investigation Board, focusing on what happens when the right stuff goes wrong.

Intermixed with the great speakers, we had a variety of fun networking events. Despite some rainy and foggy weather, many attendees participated in activities like golf at the Gravel Pit, pickleball, a beer tasting, and general socializing after the conference sessions at the various receptions. The networking time is always a highlight for many conference attendees, and the committee works hard to balance educational sessions with networking opportunities each year.

Thank you to the conference planning committee for their hard work, ensuring we had a great line-up of speakers and activities this year. Thank you to the League of Minnesota Cities staff for working hard to plan an excellent conference. If you have any feedback or speaker suggestions for next year's conference, we are always looking for additional members to join the planning committee. Please reach out to Madison to express your interest in doing so.

We look forward to seeing you at next year's conference and at various events throughout this year, too! 🍷

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Be sure to check out MCMA's website: [mncma.org](http://mncma.org)

# APMP Updates

By Cassandra Tabor, APMP President, Blaine Director of Administration

## 2023 Book Club Wrapped

Thank you to everyone who participated in our third annual APMP Book Club! We had a great turnout and received rave reviews for the book “Humble Inquiry, Second Edition: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling.” If you didn’t get a chance to read it with us, it’s still worth your time!

## APMP End of Year Social: June 8th – Invite coming!

Please join us on Thursday, June 8, at 5 p.m. at the Bauhaus Brew Labs in Minneapolis for our end of year happy hour social – a great opportunity to invite someone to come to APMP!

Bauhaus Brew Labs: 1315 Tyler Street NE, Minneapolis MN, 55413

## Call for Nominations: APMP Executive Board

Would you like to be more involved in APMP and want to share great ideas for the upcoming year? If you said “yes,” nominate yourself for the 2023-2024 APMP Executive Board! There are seven (7) seats available, the president and six (6) at-large members. If you are interested, please send a short bio and why you would like to be a board member by Friday, June 9, to the APMP Board at [AssociationofPublicManagement@gmail.com](mailto:AssociationofPublicManagement@gmail.com). Indicate which seat you would like to be considered for in your email. You must be a member of APMP to nominate yourself for the Executive Board (see next item).

## APMP Membership Renewal: Membership Application available

It’s that time of year again to renew your APMP membership. Please visit [mncma.org](http://mncma.org) for the membership application and submit your renewal for APMP (and MCMA) membership as soon as possible. The application and payment should be sent to MCMA Secretariat, League of Minnesota Cities, 145 University Avenue West, St. Paul MN 55103-2044. View the membership application form for more information. 

– Contact Tabor at [ctabor@blainemn.gov](mailto:ctabor@blainemn.gov)

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## Appointments and Other Professional News

- **Luke Fischer**, deputy director, League of Minnesota Cities, has been appointed executive director.
- **Cathy Reynolds**, city administrator, Farimont, has been appointed city administrator of Credit River.
- **Dave Unmacht**, executive director, League of Minnesota Cities, has retired.

*Do you have a new appointment or other professional news to share?*

*Contact Madison Hagenau, MCMA Secretariat, at [mhagenau@lmc.org](mailto:mhagenau@lmc.org).*

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# Been There, Done That!

## *Unsolicited Advice from Your Senior Advisors*

### **Navigating an Involuntary Transition: Part 1, Preventative Maintenance**

The Senior Advisor program is a partnership between ICMA and state. In the last issue of “Been There, Done That,” my Senior Advisor colleagues Mark McNeill and Tom Hedges described the duties and roles of the Senior Advisor program and its services to MCMA members. One of the most crucial roles they mentioned was providing support and guidance to members who have or are about to experience an involuntary termination. This is a high priority from ICMA for this program as well.

Let’s face it: this is a hazardous profession, pure and simple. We all know entering this incredibly rewarding and satisfying profession has its pitfalls, but one stands out as paramount to all others: facing an involuntary termination. With virtually no job security, every meeting of our governing board is an opportunity to lose our job. Fortunately, ICMA and MCMA understand this reality and respond with professional education and training that places a premium on recognizing, managing, and recovering from this experience.

This is the first of two MCMA newsletter articles devoted to this issue. Fortunately, we have great resources available to help. “Members in Transition: A Guide” is available on the MCMA website and “The Members Guide to a Career that Has Ups, Downs, and Detours-An ICMA Member in Transition” is available from the ICMA website. Both documents contain valuable suggestions about involuntary termination. The point of this article is only to highlight some of the salient facts and help you keep these tips top-of-mind on a regular basis. We’ve all heard the expression, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” No truer words have been said about our profession, so it pays to be proactive and take early intervention measures to always prepare yourself and your family.

***“I didn’t see it coming!”*** is an all-too-common reaction by local government managers upon learning they just landed on the losing side of a vote of confidence by their governing board. Signs of job insecurity can be detected over time and can build to a crescendo that ultimately ends up with an involuntary termination. Many terminations can be avoided with some early, repeated, and preventative maintenance measures in the manager-council relationship. These deliberate steps in managing the relationship should be a constant and ongoing practice to build, maintain, and possibly repair good working relationships. We can all agree that most managers don’t get fired because of incompetence or a lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities. They get fired because of politics or a general personality conflict, often artfully masked as “poor communication style” or “poor management style” or some such vague generality akin to a game of whack-a-mole.

It is easy to dismiss the need to be concerned about ever experiencing an involuntary termination when your assessment of the relationship, accurate or not, is very good. After all, you get along great with all elected officials, right? You just had a fantastic review and got a raise, right? The governing board adopts over 95 percent of your staff recommendations, right? If this is the case, congratulations, and I hope it continues. But in this hyper-charged political

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environment, relationships can change on a dime. The next election may bring new, surprising, and unfriendly faces. A volatile community group may bring issues that threaten to upend your priorities. Suddenly, it's a different world and the wave of goodwill and political capital that propelled the tailwinds you were riding just turned into an oncoming tsunami. Now you are the target because—well—somebody has to be!

Still, there are simple but proactive steps the manager can adopt into their style of interacting with people to enhance relationships that can help avoid, or at least soften the landing when becoming a manager in transition. Be prepared even when you don't believe it is necessary. Such measures might seem obvious, but they bear mentioning here.

**First**, re-familiarize yourself with the terms and conditions of your contract or employment agreement, especially the provisions pertaining to severance and benefits upon termination. If you did not secure an agreement when hired, try to get one now. Admittedly, this is more difficult to do after hiring since most of your leverage is gone and you have formally accepted the position, but it is worth a try.

**Second**, prepare a draft severance agreement just in case. The same goes for an updated and current resume. You don't want to spend precious time preparing these when you need to move quickly when they are needed. ICMA and MCMA have sample model employment and severance agreements for your use.

**Third**, develop strong relationships with your internal stakeholders, such as department heads and direct report/subordinate staff.

**Fourth**, build good relationships with external stakeholders, such as the local media, community organizations, and networks. If you experience a termination in the future, a healthy stockpile of goodwill you have accumulated with these groups can help ease the stress of what is about to come.

**Fifth**, cultivate and build relationships with fellow local government managers. Use MCMA, ICMA, and other colleagues in your peer group who best understand the nature of this profession and what it can be like. Take advantage of networking opportunities.

I never would have thought these were so significant had I not experienced it first-hand. The support I had from my staff, community organizations, the local media, and city management colleagues when I faced my transition was overwhelming and gratifying beyond comprehension. My community support was so strong it led to the historic recall of two elected officials.

**Sixth**, and perhaps most importantly, develop a good communicative relationship with the governing board — both individually and collectively.

- (a) Make time with each member a priority;
- (b) tailor communication style to the individual preference of each member;
- (c) establish forms of communication that err on providing too much information as opposed to too little information;
- (d) communicate regularly to all of them to avoid the accusation of 'selective information' or showing preference to one over the other;
- (e) develop a method of communicating bad news; and finally,
- (f) develop methods to educate, brief, and train new members.

*Been There, Done That! continued on page 8*

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Building personal resiliency will also increase your arsenal to withstand a transition status. Some suggestions are:

- (a) embrace lifelong learning;
- (b) cultivate a robust professional network;
- (c) seek opportunities to professionally manage your career instead of having it manage you;
- (d) always look to the future and envision the next possibility or opportunity;
- (e) maintain good mental and physical health;
- (f) keep your personal and household finances in order as a cushion against any sudden downturn in income;
- (g) keep your resume updated and ready to send out instantly.

**The ICMA Transition Guide suggests 14 warning signs that can serve as a flashing CHECK ENGINE light that indicates your job security may be in jeopardy. You may have experienced others during your career.**

1. An election signals the possibility of a new 'agenda' by the governing body.
2. Even in the absence of a recent election, you perceive shifts in the governing body's attitudes, positions, or priorities.
3. You notice a gradual reduction in the frequency and/or substance of communication from governing body members, along with a decrease in the number of your recommendations they accept.
4. Elected officials increasingly attempt to circumvent you and go through others, often your subordinate staff.
5. You notice a gradual increase in the frequency of criticism of you and possibly your staff in the media or at public meetings.
6. You notice internal or external rumors about your actions or overall performance.
7. You notice a pattern of lower ratings in your performance evaluation.
8. The governing board calls for an executive session for a "special" performance review.
9. The elected body delays or stalls negotiations to renew your contract (if your contract is term-based).
10. You receive no increase or minimal salary increase following a performance evaluation.
11. The elected body gives you new goals and objectives with an unrealistic timeframe for completion.
12. The elected body starts to "nitpick" or find fault with minor or inconsequential issues.
13. Out of the blue, your colleagues, staff, or community members start asking, "Are you ok?"
14. Elected officials dodge direct confrontational issues with you assuring you not to worry.

Good measures on the front end can help thwart the many difficulties and challenges that come with facing an involuntary termination. In the next MCMA newsletter, the "Been There, Done That" column will feature Part II of "Navigating an Involuntary Transition: When the Other Shoe Drops." ◉

- Jeff Weldon, *Senior Advisor*

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# Tell Me More About ICMA's Affiliate Organizations!

By Maria Solano, Plymouth Deputy City Manager

April was a busy month for our members with the MCMA Annual Conference. At the same time, the National Forum for Black Administrators (NFBPA) held its national conference in Minneapolis.

Hosting the NFBPA conference in Minnesota highlighted the opportunity for our members to learn more about the various ICMA affiliate associations. According to ICMA, affiliate organizations “complement the support and delivery of services to local government management professionals.” These organizations can benefit our members as they further the efforts of ICMA and MCMA and allow for shared resources.

The board encourages members to learn about ICMA's nine national affiliate organizations and explore opportunities to get involved.

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**American Public Works Association (APWA)** serves professionals in all areas of public works and includes personnel from local, county, state/province, federal agencies, and the private sector.

**CivicPRIDE** is the first nationally recognized LGBTQIA+ professional association for local government management. CivicPRIDE's mission is to advance inclusive local government by empowering LGBTQIA+ leadership.

**Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA)** represents public finance officials that plan, finance, implement, and operate governmental finance in each of their jurisdictions. GFOA's mission is to advance excellence in public finance.

**International Network of Asian Public Administrators (I-NAPA)** encourages excellence among public administrators of Asian heritage by developing the skills of emerging Asian leaders and supporting Asian public administrators by providing them with networking opportunities and other resources.

**League of Women in Government (LWG)** is the umbrella organization supporting local and statewide organizations that advance women to local government leadership. LWG's objective is to move the needle forward on the number of women serving at the most senior and executive levels in local government.

*Tell me more about ICMA's Affiliate Organizations! continued on page 10*

**Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN)** encourages professional excellence among Hispanic/Latino local government administrators. LGHN strives to improve the management of local government; provide unique resources to Hispanic local government executives and public managers; and advance the goals of professional, effective, and ethical local government administration.

**National Association of County Administrators (NACA)** encourages professional development for county administrators and provides information and resources to its members to improve the management of county government.

**National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA)** is the principal and most progressive organization dedicated to advancing Black public leadership in local and state governments. NFBPA's mission is to serve as a catalyst for linking public and private organizations and academic institutions to support the professional development of African-Americans choosing public service careers.

**Women Leading Government California (WLG CA)** is a California-based organization that inspires and prepares women to be local government executive leaders while supporting their success. ◻

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