

President's column

By Scott Neal, MCMA President, Edina City Manager

It won't surprise people who know me when I confess that I was pretty smug as a 10-year-old boy. I had the world by the tail back then. I had my own bike, which meant I had unfettered transportation in my small Iowa hometown. Because I had transportation, I could have a paper route, which meant I could earn my own money. And, my family owned a set of World Book Encyclopedias, including the full set of Childcraft books, which meant I had unlimited access to information.

Mobility + Information + Money = Smug 10-Year-Old Boy.

As a kid with his own bike, brains, and money, I could afford to indulge in the finer things of life occasionally. My favorite indulgence was the Milky Way candy bar. They were great then, and they're still great today. They're still a guilty pleasure for me today, but I'm trying to cut down.

As a smart kid with my own money, and a persistent hankering for Milky Way candy bars, it occurred to me once that I could save a ton of money if I just made my own Milky Ways at home. I mean, the manufacturer of the Milky Way was practically daring me to by putting the list of ingredients right on the wrapper! Heck, all I had to do was go to the store and buy some milk chocolate, sugar, cocoa butter, skim milk, lactose, milkfat, soy lecithin, artificial flavor, corn syrup, sugar, malted barley, and some hydrogenated palm kernel oil, and I'd be in business.

“As professional city managers and administrators, we may not be experts in everything, but we have expertise in many things.”

Simple plan, right? I'd never seen hydrogenated palm kernel oil in the store, but the Mars Company said it was in their Milky Way, and they must have bought it somewhere, so it must be in my grocery store in Independence, Iowa. Or so I thought.

In a blur of smug excitement, I rode my bike home as fast as I could from the end of my paper route that day to tell my mom about my plan. She burst out an enormous

snort laugh that a parent lets rip sometimes when their kid, whom they love, says something so stupid it's funny. After she regained her composure, she told me about food labeling and how knowing the list of ingredients isn't the same as having a recipe and culinary skills to make a Milky Way candy bar, which she was very sure wasn't in the World Book Encyclopedia or on the internet, which was still 25 years away into the future at that time.

This memory about my plan to make my own Milky Way candy bars came flooding back to me as I was reading the 2017 classic book “The Death of Expertise” by Tom Nichols. Nichols discusses the societal impacts of the increasing levels of education, technology, and almost limitless access to information. His thesis is that these forces have produced a “surge of narcissistic and misguided intellectual egalitarianism that has crippled informed debates on any number of issues.” Ouch, but so true.

Appointments and other professional news

- **Jake Dickson**, city administrator, West Concord, has been appointed assistant city administrator, Lake Elmo.
- **Jeff Cadwell**, county administrator, Cook County, has been appointed county administrator, Mahnomon County.
- **Kenneth Cammilleri**, city administrator, Pine City, has been appointed city administrator, Scandia.
- **Bart Fischer**, city administrator, Oakdale, has been appointed senior public administrator, WSB.
- **Mike Humpal**, city administrator, Fairmont, has been appointed manager of local government solutions, South Central Service Cooperative.
- **Timothy Ibisch**, city administrator, Blue Earth, has been appointed city administrator, Kasson.
- **Kathy Laur**, city administrator, Lake St. Croix Beach, has been appointed city administrator, Tonka Bay.
- **Bruce Messelt**, county administrator, Chisago County, has been appointed county administrator, Sherburne County.
- **Mike Sable** has been appointed assistant city administrator, Maplewood.
- **Mark Sievert** has been appointed to interim city administrator, Fairmont.
- **Annita Smythe**, city administrator, Cokato, has been appointed city administrator, Clearwater.
- **Kevin VanHooser**, county administrator, Isanti County, has retired.
- **Aurora Yager**, assistant administrator, Howard Lake, has been appointed administrative services director, Wayzata.

*Do you have a new appointment or other professional news to share?
Contact the secretariat at the information listed on page 3.*

MCMA Newsletter

is published three times a year for the members of the Minnesota City/County Management Association by MCMA's Secretariat:

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Your Senior Advisors are here to help!

President's column *Continued from page 1*

The death of expertise is happening in all professions, but I think we see it perhaps more clearly where the confrontations between those who know and those who think they know occurs in the public sphere. Does any of this sound familiar? Do you know the resident with no experience in street construction or engineering who believes his knowledge of both is as good, or probably even better than your city engineer's is because he has been driving a car for the past thirty years? Or, you may know the resident who enjoys a cold beer after work every day who believes she is more knowledgeable about beer, wine, and liquor marketing than your liquor store manager? Or, perhaps you've met the guy who thinks he know more about fighting a fire because he's watched a lot of videos about firefighting on YouTube.

I'll bet that we all know one of these people, or someone very much like them. In government, we frequently say that all voices matter equally. But, when we say that all voices matter equally, we must take care not to say that the voices of experts aren't any more important or valued than the voices of non-experts. I think many of us aren't being careful enough about that distinction these days. Part of Nichols' message is that there are logical consequences to this sort of irrational egalitarianism, and they're not good. I won't spoil the ending.

The people in our communities who discount our expertise may be smart. They may even have noble intentions. But, in the field of local government, they're probably not smarter than you. They almost certainly don't have the same level of local government management expertise as you do. Don't ever forget that.

As professional city managers and administrators, we may not be experts in everything, but we have expertise in many things. Use your expertise to give your best advice to your elected officials, and never forget that just because a person may know the ingredients of a Milky Way candy bar, that doesn't mean they know how to cook one up. 🍬

Contact Neal at sneal@edinamn.gov.

Board meetings recap

By Heather Corcoran, *Outgoing MCMA Secretariat*

The MCMA Board met on Oct. 4 and Dec. 13. Highlights of those meetings were:

- Approval to enter into one-year contract with the League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) for Annual Conference planning services.
- Review of plans for the 2020 Winter Workshop to be held on Friday, Jan. 31.
- Approval of a new MCMA member conduct policy (see page 6 for more information) and discussion of sharing information about the policy at upcoming MCMA events.
- Presentation from the Annual Conference Planning Committee chair and the LMC events manager on plans for the 2020 Annual Conference.
- Introduction to Madison Hagenau, Minnesota Cities Fellow and the new MCMA secretariat. Heather Corcoran, outgoing secretariat, began a new job in early January 2020.

Reaching the MCMA secretariat

For MCMA secretariat services, contact:

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**Be sure to check out
MCMA's website:**

www.mncma.org

ICMA 2020 – Toronto, eh?

By Dianne Miller, Eagan Assistant City Administrator

I have the pleasure of representing MCMA on the 2020 ICMA Conference Planning Committee as we gear up for a fabulous conference in Toronto, Canada. The committee met in Toronto in early December to plan education sessions, keynotes, etc. Following up on the record attendance in Nashville last year, Toronto is gearing up to be even better! Here are a few key takeaways and tips:

- The 2020 conference will take place Sept. 23-26, 2020 which is a **Wednesday-Saturday**. The change was made in recognition of Yom Kippur.
- Every ten years, ICMA hosts the conference in an international location. Don't let this scare you! The exchange rate is favorable and it's a quick, 1.5-hour direct flight from MSP. Take the UP Express Train from the airport, and it will bring you directly to the convention center in less than 30 minutes.
- Toronto is a wonderfully dynamic and diverse community with 3 million people. I found it to be very clean, welcoming, safe, and walkable. English is the predominant language spoken and almost every place I went accepted both Canadian and US currency.
- In response to feedback, ICMA is reserving larger blocks of rooms at nearby hotels and hoping to have a new system that will allow you to select your first, second, and third choice for hotel accommodations.
- ICMA has a new conference director, who is bringing fresh energy and ideas. For example, more off-site field demonstrations will be offered for those who like to get out and see projects around the city. Additional featured speakers are also being added to the conference for those who like to listen and be inspired by standout individuals.
- The 2020 conference team is focusing on improving the conference experience — larger rooms will be provided for popular sessions and the conference app will include an accurate description of what you can expect to learn at each session.
- International speakers will be thoughtfully integrated into educational sessions so we get a truly global perspective on relevant topics.

We are in the process of finding an awesome location to host our Minnesota dinner, which will take place on Thursday, Sept. 24. Stay tuned for more details.

If you have any questions about the conference or ideas to share, please feel free to reach out to me at (651) 675-5014 or dmiller@cityofeagan.com. Now, go open your calendar and book Sept. 23-26, 2020 because this is an ICMA Conference you won't want to miss! 🍷

Contact Miller at dmiller@cityofeagan.com.

**Be sure to
check out
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website:
www.mncma.org**

New CoachConnect platform from ICMA


By Susan Arntz, Waconia City Administrator

Thank you to all for your service to support the profession and our community of learners. As many of you know, MCMA is an affiliate partner with ICMA on their coaching program. The program offers a lot of great tools and resources for all members, regardless of their career stage, including:

- Six live webinars per year spotlighting best practices on key topics from local government professionals throughout the U.S. — and you can invite your whole team to participate.
- Digital agendas and archives with video recordings and extensive presentation materials and examples from dozens of sessions available in a convenient online library — delivering you “professional development in a box” — when you want it and where you want it.
- Talent development resources to make greater use of your talent and have fun doing it.
- Speed coaching session at the ICMA Annual Conference and templates for use at the local level — expand your networks.
- “Career Compass” columns that address critical career issues.
- One-on-one coaching provided through our online platform, ICMA CoachConnect.

This fall, ICMA announced the new CoachConnect platform. This tool can be used by members looking for a coach and for those who wish to continue to serve as a coach. Through personalized online mentoring sessions, you will be able to share the knowledge you’ve gained through years of experience and accelerate the professional and personal growth of learners. As a coach, you’ll have the opportunity to play a key role in fostering insight, inspiring ideas, and expanding growth opportunities for aspiring leaders.

To sign-up to coach or as someone who wants to be coached, first request an account by completing the form at [icma.org/forms/coaching-interest-form](https://www.icma.org/forms/coaching-interest-form). By each Friday, new invitations are confirmed and sent. Add icma@instaviser.com to your contacts in order to whitelist this email so the invitation gets to your mailbox. This new platform does not need your ICMA credentials, you can choose any email password combination, or you can login with your LinkedIn credentials.

Don’t forget to find coaching support and resources on the ICMA Coaching Resources and FAQ page. If you are curious about the program, want information, or have questions, please contact Susan Arntz at sarntz@waconia.org. 

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“This tool can be used by members looking for a coach and for those who wish to continue to serve as a coach.”

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New MCMA member conduct policy

By Scott Neal, MCMA President, Edina City Manager

The board unanimously adopted a new member conduct policy at its Dec. 13 meeting. The policy describes the behavioral expectations we should have for each other in our professional settings and at our events. The policy also describes what may happen to members if those expectations are violated.

At the heart of this new policy is the board's wish that all of our members feel welcome at all of our events. That's not currently the case. We can — and must — be better than that.

The member conduct policy is posted on the website here. I will do a brief review of the new policy at our Mid-Winter Workshop and go into it in more detail at our annual conference at Grandview in May. ☐

Contact Neal at sneal@edinamn.gov.

APMP update

By Maria Solano, APMP President, St. Louis Park Senior Management Analyst

APMP continues to provide a collaborative environment for learning and networking! Once again, we had a successful fall conference that focused on leading with cultural awareness. Discussion topics included a demographic forecast presentation by Met Council, a cultural walk to better understand our own backgrounds, a presentation on disability awareness and etiquette, and an organizational inclusion panel. The board heard great feedback from attendees and is excited for next year's fall conference! A special thank you to our great presenters, as well as St. Cloud State University for hosting the event at their Plymouth campus.

At the November meeting, one of our members, Mac Leydon, led a great discussion using his master's capstone project, "Building Foundation for Continuous Improvement: Innovative Tools and Techniques for Local Government Leaders." Lastly, the MAMA/APMP happy hour on Dec. 11 was held in lieu of a December APMP meeting.

Did you miss the opportunity to attend an APMP event in 2019? No big deal, join us in 2020! On Jan. 23 we will be hosting "The Do and Do(nut)s of Lobbying for Cities" (yes, there will be donuts) with a presentation and tour of the Capitol from the League of Minnesota Cities' intergovernmental relations (IGR) staff. We are in the process of developing the late winter/spring topics which will include a partnership with the Women in the Profession Committee, a tour of a local county jail, and a panel on next career moves.

Thank you to everyone who has attended our meetings, and make sure you stay connected on our Facebook page for more information on future events! Feel free to reach out to any of the board members for additional information, and we hope to see you soon! ☐

Contact Solano at msolano@stlouispark.org.

My experience with renewal

By Brad Martens, Corcoran City Administrator

A little over a year ago I found myself contemplating my career path as a city administrator. I was approaching my 15th year of public service with a majority of that time in the administrator role.

Overall, I was pleased with the work I was doing and I was checking all the boxes I felt I should in order to be successful (continued education, involved in committees and boards, building relationships, etc.). Still, I had this nagging thought in my head that wouldn't go away. I kept wondering if the groove I was in, may in fact be a rut. By no means am I a seasoned veteran in our field, yet I've done this enough to know the challenges of the work we do. In my head I kept asking: Is this the right path? Am I making a difference? Am I happy?

While sharing these thoughts with a colleague it was recommended that I look into the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute through the Wilder Foundation. I attended an informational session and was hooked. The program supports and encourages leaders to renew, recharge, and rededicate through fairly intense and structured personal reflection. I was honored to be selected for the 2019 cohort program. It ended in November with a weekend retreat in which we shared our plans for renewal.

I won't go into my personal plan here (I am happy to talk about it with anyone who is interested) however, I will share that putting the time in for personal reflection and self-growth has been incredibly powerful. I've redefined

my personal values and reaffirmed that this career is where I want to be at this point in my life. Most important

has been the realization that I am empowered to do the work I do in a way that works best for me. I'm much more discerning about what I spend my time on and I've developed tools that ensure I'm carving out time for me and my

family. This required crucial conversations with my council and team to set up boundaries including limiting the amount of time I'm willing to focus on work.

What I've found is, while I'm working fewer hours than I was before, the renewed focus has actually resulted in increased effectiveness and productivity; even more, I'm happier. My team and others have noticed and commented on it.

I know that none of this is rocket science and that the readership at this point is probably half of those that started. We all know the value of spending time critically thinking about ourselves and the work we do. However, in speaking with colleagues over the last several months while going through this program, I'm not sure how many of us actually do it. For those of you who don't, let this be a personal nudge from me to you. It's amazing what can happen when we invest as much effort in ourselves as we do in others. ○

Contact Martens at bmartens@ci.corcoran.mn.us.

“In my head I kept asking: Is this the right path? Am I making a difference? Am I happy?”

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www.mncma.org