

## The President's Column

### Books That Have Changed Me

By Brad Martens, MCMA President, Shoreview City Manager

Happy December! We're here at the end of another year and I hope that 2023 has been a good year for you, your organization, and most importantly your family. May your strategic goals be accomplished, and your levy increase at a lower percentage than your neighboring cities.

I write this article immediately after completing my self-evaluation as part of my annual review. It has me in a little more reflective mood than normal, contemplating whether I've used my time as wisely as I could have. As I mentioned at the conference in May, one of my core values is continuous improvement. To live this value, I learn from people, books, and the world by devoting time to reading, focusing on the present, and being adventurous. It's often hard for me to stay in the present, and adventure can be scary. However, I keep those in my values as they challenge me to be better on both accounts. Reading is the part I do well.

I've kept track of the books I've read since my first Don Salverda book club in 2011. I can confidently say that reading has made me a better leader and opened my eyes to countless ideas and areas for potential improvement. I thought I would use this opportunity to share my top five books that have offered me the most over the years.

#### **"Miracle Morning" by Hal Elrod**

This book changed the way I start my days and has made a big impact on my life. Hal's recipe for a miracle morning focuses on SAVERS, which stands for silence (meditation), affirmation, visualization, exercise, reading, and script (journal). While nowhere near

perfect, I do most of these every day. Just reading every morning made a huge impact. Prior to this book I averaged six books a year. Since reading this book, I averaged 26 and will have my PR this year at 39. This book inspired me to start my days differently and it changed my life. Oh, and there is a Miracle Morning book for families too.

#### **"What Got You Here Won't Get You There" by Marshall Goldsmith**

As I acquired more responsibilities throughout my career, it was apparent that just working harder was not going to cut it. I had to work differently. This book has a section on the 20 habits that hold you back from the top, which was enlightening. I immediately took on changing five of my worst habits and it made a big difference.

#### **"Leadership and Self-Deception" by The Arbinger Institute**

This book tells a story to show how we often use self-deception to cause harm to others all while justifying our own actions. It's kind of the leadership book version of Taylor Swift's song "Anti-Hero". "It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me." I've read this book three times and I'm still the problem. Just less often.

#### **"Braving the Wilderness" by Brene Brown**

Learning to become your true self takes a lot of hard work and self-reflection. I read this book at the perfect time while I was taking part in the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute through the Wilder Foundation. It helped me transition from "city manager Brad" to "Brad, who happens to be a city manager". A powerful difference for how I approach the world.

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Association  
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## Appointments and Other Professional News

- **Charnelle Dengnoue**, human resources/risk management manager, Robbinsdale, has been hired as human resource director, Shoreview.
- **Ari Lenz**, assistant city manager, Hopkins, has been hired as assistant city manager, Edina.

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

## MCMA Board Meeting Recap

*By Madison Hagenau, MCMA Secretariat*

The MCMA Board met on October 13 and December 8. Highlights of the meetings:

- Reviewed plans for 2024 Winter Workshop and 2024 Annual Conference
- Approved 2024 Annual Conference budget and sponsorship opportunities
- Reviewed and updated Senior Advisor territories

## Reaching the MCMA secretariat

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

# APMP Update

By Aurora Yager, APMP President, Wayzata Deputy City Manager

## 2023 CONFERENCE RECAP

APMP held our annual conference, Legislative Tsunamis: Surviving Waves of Legislative Change in Local Government, at the League of Minnesota Cities on October 26. We had 32 local government professionals in attendance from about as many municipalities.

The conference started with a rapid-fire legislative update courtesy of the League's intergovernmental relations staff. Against the backdrop of a historically significant legislative session, attendees delved into the local implications of cannabis legalization. City planners, the MMBA, and a city attorney from Missouri shared their insights into the legalization process and its current and projected impacts on cities. Luke Fischer's engaging tour of the new League facilities provided a behind-the-scenes look at the decision-making that drove their recent remodel. One of the last sessions explored the nuances of implementing earned sick and safe time, drawing on the City of Bloomington's lessons learned and recommendations from Abdo.

Overall, the conference was a great balance of content and connection. While virtual trainings offer accessibility and convenience, the conference reaffirmed the richness of in-person learning and relationship building with others in our profession.

## 2024 BOOK CLUB

The APMP Book Club will be back for its fourth year! It's a great way to learn and connect with colleagues outside of regular meetings while also crossing something off your to-be-read list. Over the years we've discussed many thought-provoking works such as "A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota" (2021), "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City" (2022), and most recently, "Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling" (2023).

Stay tuned for exciting updates in January as we announce the book selection for 2024 and open sign-ups.

For more information on our meeting schedule and upcoming topics, visit our dedicated webpage on MCMA's website. Feel free to reach out to me or any other member of the Board with any questions. 📧

– Contact Yager at [ayager@wayzata.org](mailto:ayager@wayzata.org)

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*President's column continued from page 1*

## "The Daily Stoic" by Ryan Holiday

I read a stoic message from this book every morning and it helps center me. I spend more time focusing on what I can control and not letting my emotions get the best of me. It's very helpful for those "what did you just say on camera" moments in the council chambers.

Thank you for letting me share this list with you. I hope it inspires you to continue your growth journey as we move into 2024. I wish you a happy holiday season and hope that next year is your best year yet. 📧

– Contact Martens at [bmartens@shoreviewmn.gov](mailto:bmartens@shoreviewmn.gov)

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

# 2024 Winter Workshop

*By Jackie Schulze, Waconia Assistant City Administrator, MCMA 2nd Vice President*

Join us on Friday, Feb. 2 for our annual winter workshop. The committee has put together an excellent program for this year's event, which centers on connecting across generations and the value of mentorships.

The morning will start with a keynote from Hannah Ubl on how we can connect across generations. In the afternoon we will learn from a panel of our peers who have been mentored or are considered mentors in the field. We'll end the day with a fun speed networking activity that focuses on "mentoring up" hosted by the Women in the Profession Committee.

This year's winter workshop will take place at CHS Field, and everyone is welcome to stay for happy hour following the conclusion of the workshop. ☐

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## Building Stronger Connections Between Tribal Nations and Local Governments

*By Matt Fulton, ICMA Midwest Regional Director*

ICMA is interested in exploring the idea of convening conversations with local government executives aimed at fostering improved communication and relationships with adjacent/contiguous tribal nations. At a time when the need for cooperative and respectful relationships among all community members and entities is more critical than ever, ICMA is seeking your expertise and passion to build dynamic cohorts of members who work with tribal nations. The idea is to create an ongoing forum where leaders, experts, and stakeholders can come together to share experiences, best practices, and innovative solutions that will enhance collaboration and build stronger, supportive relationships between tribal nations and local governments.

These cohort discussions would be organized within each ICMA regional area and would be designed to facilitate meaningful conversations, knowledge exchange, and the development of actionable strategies to address the complex challenges faced by tribal nations and local governments alike. By participating in this cohort, you will have the opportunity to network with fellow ICMA members and contribute to the development of sustainable, equitable, and mutually beneficial solutions.

If you share our commitment to building stronger relationships between tribal nations and local governments, we invite you to join us on this journey. ☐

**Please let Matt Fulton, ICMA Midwest regional director, know if you are interested in joining this conversation. He can be contacted at 651-242-2422 or [mfulton@icma.org](mailto:mfulton@icma.org)**

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# Are You a Community Leader and What Does This Mean?

*By Peyton Mastera, Dilworth City Administrator, MCMA 1st vice president*

I was recently asked to participate in a conversation alongside city managers/administrators from across the country at the ICMA annual conference in Austin about our role as managers in today's environment and how we see our roles evolving. There is a general understanding amongst the profession that there exists a dichotomy between elected officials and ourselves and that above anything, administrators shall remain neutral in matters, to the extent possible. But is that dichotomy supposed to be as rigid as we make it out to be? Is it incumbent upon us to be more than just an implementer of policy, but also a leader of our community? And is it a given that neutrality is defined by alignment (more specifically, being neutral to the point of disregarding obvious harmful policy)?

These theoretical questions are part of a larger conversation this group is exploring over a year's span with the hope of redefining what a city manager's responsibility is in their community.

Our profession is familiar with the ICMA Code of Ethics. As public administrators, it is our responsibility to adhere to the fundamental tenets set forth in the code; but, are you familiar with ICMA's Declaration of Ideals (DOI)? If not, please take a few minutes to review those at [icma.org/declaration-ideals](https://www.icma.org/declaration-ideals).

The DOI restates the foundational principles of preserving "values and integrity of representative local government and democracy," and it shows how we accomplish this through building public trust, achieving equity and social justice, affirming human dignity, and improving quality of life. So as an administrator, are you considering this in your everyday actions or does the DOI put us at odds with the traditional dichotomy of the profession? We will be reevaluating the DOI as part of this exercise to ensure it aligns with contemporary management in an increasingly volatile climate and engaging necessary stakeholders as part of the evaluation.

All participants in Austin were asked to have a similar conversation with their state's affiliate organizations so that ICMA can have a collective viewpoint on this subject. I look forward to having this conversation with MCMA membership and bringing back our perspective at next year's ICMA annual conference in Pittsburgh. ◻

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# Been There, Done That!

## *Unsolicited Advice from Your Senior Advisors*

By Bill Craig, MCMA Senior Advisor

It has been said that no one should underestimate the intelligence of the American people — or overestimate the accuracy of the information they have to make decisions. Local government is, sadly, an example of that. I have never forgotten the mayor of a city near the one I served who asked me a “technical question.” He noted that his city’s water utility was in poor condition, with many leaks and water main fractures. On the other hand, the sewer utility was relatively modern and worked well. He asked whether they could switch pipes — run sewage through the water mains, and vice versa. He was disappointed with my choked-out negative response.

Water seems to be a difficult problem for many people. One lady complained of water in her basement, demanding the city fix the situation. Noting that we had no sewer in her area, I told her I suspected that her house emptied directly into the river. She replied, “Don’t you think I know that?” I went on to note that the river was at flood stage, and she said it was halfway up her back yard. I then said that the water in the basement was at the same level as the water in her yard. Stunned, she asked me, “How did you know that?” She still wanted us to pump it out. While she was still momentarily impressed with my clairvoyance, I told her pumping would be a bad idea, since if it worked (doubtful), there was a good chance the saturated soil around the house would collapse the basement.

On one occasion our mayor summoned the city engineer and me to hear a claim for damages. The complainant, who had a shallow do-it-yourself sewer connection, said that the city crew had frozen his sewer line during a January thaw by digging out a storm sewer inlet near his sewer line and letting water flow into it. The mayor inquired whether we were responsible for this loss. The city engineer, knowing that the water flow would have the opposite effect, ever the diplomat, responded, “Not unless he has discovered a new law of thermodynamics.”

Other cities have obtained property on high ground for future water tanks, only to have citizens protest that the tank would “ruin the view” and should be placed on low ground, preferably in the woods. One lady ran for a city council position solely because she wanted the city water tank painted dark purple — only to find the main reason tanks are usually painted silver or light colors, which ruined her day.

*Been There, Done That! continued on page 6*

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Any manager or administrator who has dealt with a railroad knows how much fun that can be. The council in one city I served listed at a goal session a desire to replace a railway overpass over a busy street, allowing the expansion of the traffic lanes. The city engineer immediately asked the railroad about rail engineering firms acceptable to them, to be ready to go if the council appropriated funds. About three weeks later, the mayor told me he was disappointed because he had not seen the city public works crew start demolishing the overpass. I pointed out that it was still used daily by trains, but he responded that he thought railroads were on the way out anyway.

The point of all this is that we can't assume that people know anything about our jobs, and we need to help provide the education that, sadly, is not provided in schools. It may seem like the classic scene in the movie "Airplane" — "first there were dinosaurs, then they died and became oil" — but sometimes we have to start at the beginning.

I can't leave this subject without sharing my favorite moment from "talk radio." A lady called in to complain about skateboarders using sidewalks, menacing pedestrians. She went on to attack the city for favoring skateboarders by putting in curb ramps at intersections. The radio host gently suggested that the ramps were to benefit the elderly and the handicapped, and she responded. "They shouldn't be on skateboards anyway!" ☐

– Contact Craig at [wmpcraig@aol.com](mailto:wmpcraig@aol.com).

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## New Senior Advisor Regions Assigned

At its October meeting, the MCMA Board acknowledged a restructuring of the regions for which each of the state's five Senior Advisors (SAs) will have primary responsibilities for assisting MCMA members.

SAs are retired members of the profession who are appointed by the Board to act in a volunteer capacity to assist MCMA members with personal and professional concerns.

Previously, the regions for which each of the SAs had been assigned had been on a non-consistent basis, which resulted in a somewhat confusing "patchwork quilt" of who had which areas. The earlier assignments also failed to provide SAs with a relatively equal number of members to contact.

After reviewing several alternatives, the SA territories have now been divided into the following responsibilities:

- **Bill Craig:** Hennepin County north of I-94; Mille Lacs, Benton, Wright, and Anoka Counties
- **Geralyn Barone:** Hennepin County south of I-94; Carver and Washington Counties
- **Craig Dawson:** Scott, Dakota, and Ramsey Counties
- **Jeff Weldon:** Northern and western Minnesota (north of metro area for counties not otherwise listed, and north of I-94)
- **Mark McNeill:** Southern and western MN (south of metro area, and I-94).

It should be noted that MCMA members are not obligated to go through the listed SA for their location and may contact any SA with whom they feel comfortable. Contact information for the five SAs is listed on the MCMA website. A map of the SA territories can also be found on the MCMA website. ☐