



“Where have all the ... gone?”

by Val Turner, CMMA – President of Manitoba Municipal Administrators Association

Our seasons change so quickly. Here we are with fall upon us already. Who stole our summer?

More often than not, we seem to wish our time away. On Monday, we wish it to be Friday; in the fall, we wish summer was back; and when our holidays are over, we wish we were just starting them. Time seems to pass quickly enough without wishing it away.

Time passes quickly within the MMAA as well. It seems like it was just yesterday our careers started, then suddenly our friends and associates find retirement is just around the corner. It's hard to believe that those people 'my age' are already eligible for retirement.

There has been a great deal of talk about upcoming retirements and the possibility of a shortage of CAOs. We had a look and the talk was right – projections show the possibility of a large turnover in the next five years. Is this a challenge, an opportunity or, perhaps, both? In order to study the situation more closely, representatives from MMAA, the University of Manitoba, the AMM and Intergovernmental Affairs were brought together for consultation, with the participation of the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities about to begin shortly.

The committee considered a number of issues. First, as these changes come upon us what can be done to diminish the possibility of a negative impact. As a general principal, committee members felt that municipalities need to do some succession planning. Municipalities must ask the question: *What will we do when our CAO leaves this position?* One of the first steps council might want to consider is an evaluation of the

position. Should that position be structured exactly as it has been for the last 20 years? How has the municipality changed and what are its needs today? Is a full-time position required or is part-time now adequate? Can the municipality share CAO resources with neighbouring jurisdictions? What qualifications are needed now as compared to 20 years ago? Are there potential candidates within the office? Should someone be hired and trained for a period of time before the retirement takes place? How can a municipality attract the right candidates for the position?

The committee agreed that this planning task is not always as straight forward as it may appear and that some recommended structure would be valuable. Our Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade partners agreed to develop a tool referred to as a 'Deci-

sion-Making Tree' that would help guide us through the process. It would act as an evaluation tool to enable municipalities to work through and evaluate their needs and the decision about the nature of the replacement best suited to their municipal organization. The results of their work will be presented as a draft to the committee for its review.

The committee also identified the challenge of attracting the right candidates. Members agreed that advertisements were of premier importance. The ability of the ad to truly define the opportunity was crucial. Intergovernmental Affairs again stepped forward to present a number of samples of advertisements which displayed both strengths and weaknesses. They agreed to draft a template to help municipalities place ads for CAO positions. These templates would differ, depending on the size and general characteristics of varying groups of municipalities. These templates will be presented to the committee, in a similar way to the *Decision-Making Tree*, for its review and recommendations.

Another area of concern to the committee was a growing need for additional skills at the CAO position. Such areas as Human Resource Management were identified as challenges for some candidates currently working within the profession. Participants from the University of Manitoba agreed to investigate solutions to this challenge. They are currently considering opportunities for enhanced learning, both within and as a supplement to the CMMA program. It is expected that their findings will be presented to the committee in the near future.



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Discussions surrounding this CAO shortage also turned to the problem of attracting new prospects of all ages to the profession, but in particular young people who are just now planning their careers. The MMAA, in cooperation all of the partners in this project, is considering the development of a promotional tool which could be distributed to any number of educational institutions including colleges and high schools. Members speculated that promoting this career opportunity to and through high school career counsellors would be an excellent way to target our youth, especially those that may wish to remain in a rural community setting.

It is important that all the municipal stakeholders in this province work together to ensure the best results for the future of our municipalities. ●



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