

COUNCIL & STAFF: Building a Strong Partnership

Anatomy of a City Government

- City Council members are:
 - Elected and serve limited terms
 - Responsible for setting the city's priorities
- City staff members are:
 - Hired and serve indefinitely
 - Responsible for implementing priorities

Statutes, Charter, Ordinances

- Set roles of council and mayor
 - Budgets
 - Supervisory roles
 - Policy Setting
- Provides for duties for some city staff
 - Secretary
 - Treasurer

Tools for building relationships

- Personnel Manual
- Organizational Charts
- Purchasing Policies
- Ordinances
- Meetings
- Training
- Job Descriptions
- Staff Reports

Personnel Policies

- Ensure it is clear who the boss is.
- Chain of Command.
 - City Manager
 - Mayor
 - Supervisor
 - Council

Potential for conflict...

- Data vs. public opinion
- Needs of constituents vs. needs of entire community
- Long-term goals vs. short-term perspective
- Priority setting
- Failure to adhere to defined roles

Data vs. Public Opinion

"From the engineer's perspective, I suspect that there is a right answer to the problem, and the engineer might ask, 'Will the council have the political courage to accept it?' But, as an elected official, I do not see the right answer. I see a very complicated set of forces and a problem infused with choices about values symbolized by a decision about a traffic light."

- John Nalbandian

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The Need to Function as a Unit

- Cities are the “front lines” of government
- Today government faces challenges like
 - Widespread cynicism
 - Special interest groups
 - Divisiveness
 - Lack of trust in institutions
 - NextDoor
- Cities need to present a united front to inspire and maintain the public’s trust

Different, but Complementary

COUNCIL	STAFF
Stays in touch with the needs of the public	Has expertise on the issues
Comes in with new ideas to implement	Holds institutional knowledge
Develops long-term goals and priorities	Provides input and advice while respecting democratic process
Oversees city manager	Reports to city manager
Passes ordinances	Implements ordinances

Rule 1: the Golden Rule

- Leaders builds culture, set the tone by:
 - Soliciting advice
 - Respecting staff's expertise
 - Accepting constructive feedback
- Commit to collaboration
- Establish ground rules for working together

When Things Go Wrong...

- Commissioner versus police chief in Cincinnati: “You're not going to micromanage me!”
- Fighting between Baltimore Mayor and Comptroller cost the city millions
- In Texarkana, a City Secretary faced termination after clashing with Council

City Staff are Valuable

- Often hold advanced degrees (e.g. in engineering, finance, or management)
- Ask, “How have we been doing things?”
- “What’s worked and what hasn’t?”
- “What am I missing here?”

City Council is voice of city

City Staff:

- When in doubt about policy, take it to council
- Ensure annual review of city priorities
- Provide information promptly and completely when asked by Council or Mayor
- Make it work

Rule 2: Who's the Boss?

- Council members generally should not be involved in day-to-day operations.
- Staff should not set policy without council involvement.
- The staff reports to the city manager/mayor
- Council members should work through the chain of command.

Staff Relations Policies

- "Neither the City Council nor any member shall give orders to any subordinates of the City Manager, either publicly or privately."
- "In its governance role, the Council/Board will continue to be dedicated to friendly and courteous relationships with Staff, other Council/Board members, and the public, and seek to improve the quality and image of public service."

Ethical Dilemmas

- A council member asks a staff member to work on a pet project.
 - Not okay. The member needs to work with the rest of the council to set priorities. Take it to council or work with the mayor or city administrator/mayor

- Staff is asked to work on a project that was not made a priority at a public meeting.
 - This diverts staff from their official “marching orders” and puts them in a difficult position.

Conclusion



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