Navigating Dysfunctional Councils

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City Manager
Discussion Topics

- Core Issues
- Self-Reflection
- Expectations
- Governance Tools
- Support Network
Identify the Core Issues

- **Relationships**
  - Dysfunctional Group Dynamics

- **Engagement**
  - Disengaged Councilors

- **Ambiguity**
  - Uncertainty around Roles & Responsibilities
Take Time to Self-Reflect

- Have you developed and/or communicated your professional values and tenants with the Council? With your executive team and organization?
- Do you have a strong working relationship with the Mayor and Councilors?
- What are you doing to ensure positive employee morale?
- Do you have the support of your executive team?
City Manager Commitments

<table>
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<th>Support</th>
<th>Help</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Guide &amp; Develop</th>
<th>Engage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Support the entire governing board to be productive and successful</td>
<td>Help each councilor to succeed as an effective elected official</td>
<td>Work collaboratively to keep the council focused on priorities and make progress</td>
<td>Guide and develop staff and organizational culture</td>
<td>Engage the community to build trust and confidence in local government</td>
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City Manager Commitments

**Support is:**
- Remaining Neutral & Objective
- Treating Councilors Equitably
- Managing Council’s Workload

**Help is:**
- Providing Training & Tools for Success
- Being Constructive when Asked for Feedback
- Meeting with Councilors Regularly

**Collaborate is:**
- Working with Council to Establish Annual Goals
- Celebrating Wins
- Updating Council Often about Goal Progress
- Managing Expectations

**Engage is:**
- Valuing Inclusive Engagement
- Investing in Local Leadership Programs to Develop Community Ambassadors
- Sharing Good News and Opportunities for Improvement

**Guide/Develop is:**
- Building Awareness of Council Needs/Challenges
- Cultivating a Service-Oriented Culture
- Balancing Core Services with Council Priorities
Communicating Expectations

Seek to Understand
Learn what’s personally and professionally important to your councilors. What’s their story?

Set Boundaries
Remember a councilor is your boss, not your friend. Do not engage in partisan political discussions. Ensure clear guidelines for council/staff communications.

Stay Neutral
Don’t take sides. Stay objective when asked for constructive feedback. Don’t give political advice.

Clarify Roles & Responsibilities
Help Council understand its role around policy development vs administration and implementation.

Communicate Regularly
Communicate equitably and consistently. Provide baseline information to all. Explain the “why.”
Dimensions of Governmental Process

Illustrative tasks for council:
- Determine “purpose,” scope of services, tax level, constitutional issues
- Pass ordinances: approve new projects and programs; ratify budget
- Make implementing decisions (e.g., site selection; handle complaints; oversee administration
- Suggest Management changes to manager; review organizational performance, in manager’s appraisal

Council’s Sphere

Illustrative tasks for administrators:
- Advise (what city “can” do may influence what it “should do”): analyze conditions and trends
- Make recommendations on all decisions: formulate budget; determine service distribution formulae
- Establish practices and procedures and make decisions for implementing policy
- Control the human, material, and informational resources of organization to support policy and administrative functions

Manager’s Sphere

The curved line suggests the division between the council’s and the manager’s sphere’s of activity. The division presented is intended to roughly approximate a “proper” degree of separation and sharing.

Source: The Effective Local Government Manager
Develop Governance Strategies

Council Relations Policy
• Develop a council norms and values statement to support behavior changes
• Develop a council relations policy to reinforce the City Charter and clarify council and manager roles and responsibilities, communications, decision making, and improper use of influence, and procedures to address policy violations.

Rules of Procedures/Council Protocols
• Update rules of procedure to include city charter provisions and clarify meeting processes
  • Who sets agenda/how items are scheduled for a future agenda
  • Who can call a special meeting and what’s required
  • How Council directs the City Manager (during a public meeting and/or outside a public meeting)

Meeting Management
• Understand bandwidth of Council
• Don’t overload agenda
• Provide parliamentarian training
• Schedule complex and/or controversial items at a special meeting
Build a Support Network

• Partner and Strategize with your City Attorney
• Contact your OCCMA and/or ICMA Senior Advisor
• Find confidants OUTSIDE of your organization
  • For public record reasons, meet in person and/or use personal cell/email to communicate.

Resources:
• International City/County Management Association (ICMA)  www.icma.org
  Article: Essentials of Council-Manager Relationships (Kevin Duggan)
• Institute for Local Government (ILG)  www.ca-lig.org
  Articles: Attributes of Exceptional Councils; Board/Executive Staff Communication Strategies
Thank you

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