

July 18<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Private and Confidential**

Reeve Harvey Harriott and Councillors

RM of Meadow Lake #588

Box 668

Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan S9X 1Y1

**Dear Reeve Harriott and Councillors:**

We are pleased to provide Council with an Executive Summary of our **Governance/Management Report** of the RM of Meadow Lake. This Review has been conducted over the period of April-July 2021 and has been drafted in accordance with the terms of reference which were included in our outline of governance review options and as agreed to by your resolution of April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

We have appreciated the response and cooperation of both Council and the administration to this Review. Our inquiries and requests for additional background information were responded to quite quickly and with openness and candour. Due to Co-vid 19, we were not able to travel to the RM office until just recently and thus had to rely on the survey responses and telephone interviews. Everyone coped with these limitations and while we would have appreciated being able to be on site, we do not feel that this restriction impacted the quality of our findings.

We have attempted to cover all of the key issues in this Executive Summary which we felt were germane to our Audit in a comprehensive, professional manner.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Yours very truly,



George B Cuff, FCMC

President

**Introduction**

We are pleased to enclose the Executive Summary of our Report on the Governance Audit of the RM of Meadow Lake as conducted by George B Cuff & Associates Ltd. All of the statements in this Report are germane to the issues and circumstances which we found in our Audit. We have relied extensively on our confidential surveys which were distributed to all members of Council, senior management and administration as well the confidential telephone calls which we also held with these same individuals.

### Some Relevant Background

- **Organizational Overview**

The RM is led by a seven-person Council including a Reeve who is elected from the RM as a whole. The most recent Saskatchewan municipal election occurred on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020, amidst the Co-vid pandemic. This disease/pandemic impacted all municipalities and produced unique challenges in terms of providing municipal services and restrictions in terms of connecting with all residents of the RM jurisdiction.

The administration of the RM is established under the guidance of a CAO and seven “manager” positions all reporting to the CAO: PW Manager, Financial Officer, Road Consultant, Office Intern, Planning & Development Officer, Enforcement Officer and Assistant Administrator. These seven staff members are largely workers rather than supervisors albeit the Manager of Public Works is expected to guide the day-to-day activities of the field staff which consists of 13 employees in Public Works, largely labourers, truck drivers and equipment operators, some of whom are seasonal.

### Purpose of the RM

The Municipalities Act of Saskatchewan sets out the parameters within which municipalities like the RM of Meadow Lake are to function. The Municipalities Act begins with a definition of the purpose of a municipality by stating:

*2) The purposes of municipalities are the following:*

*(a) to provide good government; (b) to provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary and desirable for all or a part of the municipality; (c) to develop and maintain a safe and viable community; (d) to foster economic, social and environmental well-being; (e) to provide wise stewardship of public assets.*

While “good government” is not defined, it presumably casts a net over those things which a Council decides to do that it views as supportive of the well-being of its citizens. This sentiment is conveyed in the subsequent clause regarding “services, facilities or other things” deemed necessary or desirable. This is what this Council is expected to do and how it should therefore govern. Council needs to address: what needs to be done; what do our citizens see as a priority; what ought to be done by the municipality; and what can our citizens afford? The decision-making processes that lead to the answers to those questions are what we refer to as “governance”. Governance relies on the combined efforts of management led by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) in providing Council with the information and advice needed to make an informed decision. It places the focus on the policy impacts of a potential decision as management recognizes that future issues of a similar nature should benefit from the policy leadership set by this Council.

### **Roles of Reeve and Councillors**

The Act provides Council members (including the Reeve) with a broad array of responsibilities. These are stated quite generally and speak to a Council member’s basic roles. These roles include:

#### ***General duties of councillors***

*92 Councillors have the following duties:*

*(a) to represent the public and to consider the well-being and interests of the municipality; (b) to participate in developing and evaluating the policies, services and programs of the municipality; (c) to participate in council meetings and council committee meetings and meetings of other bodies to which they are appointed by the council; (d) to ensure that administrative practices and procedures are in place to implement the decisions of council; (e) subject to the bylaws made pursuant to section 81.1, to keep in confidence matters discussed in private or to be discussed in private at a council or council committee meeting until discussed at a meeting held in public; (f) to maintain the financial integrity of the municipality; (g) to perform any other duty or function imposed on councillors by this or any other Act or by the council.*

The Act speaks to the obligation upon members of Council to “consider the wellbeing and interests of the municipality” when in fact in an RM, the elected Councillors come from a

division (or ward) and do not therefore represent the whole RM. And yet, this is how a Councillor is to decide issues: from a “**what** is in the best interests of all citizens?” not how does this affect “my” ratepayers?

Councillors are to “*to participate in developing and evaluating the policies, services and programs of the municipality*”. The “developing” aspects of this clause are largely presumed to have been delegated to the CAO and the administration. “*Evaluating*” however is what Council does. It assesses how well the policies and services, or programs of the RM seem to be working and their degree of acceptance by their residents/businesses. This requires a Council to hear what is being said by its citizens and to respond accordingly to the expression of those concerns.

In order to perform their roles effectively and as expected, Councillors need to be there for the meetings and be prepared to participate therein. While some members may be inclined to speak on each issue or to question each report, others may be less vocal and yet still “participate”.

Preparation for Council meetings is also key to any participation. Preparation suggests that all Councillors have read their background materials and are ready to ask any questions that the administrative reports bring to mind. Where there are questions, the legislation refers to the role of the CAO as chief advisor and directs the Council to seek the answers to their questions from the CAO.

We note that the Act requires that Councillors “*keep in confidence matters discussed in private or to be discussed in private at a council or council committee meeting until discussed at a meeting held in public*”. This is not a suggestion: it is the law. For certain, and above all other considerations, each member of Council ought to be a law-abiding citizen. Regardless of whether or not a Councillor votes in favour of going “in camera”, each is required to maintain a strict silence about what transpired behind closed doors.

- **The Reeve as Leader of Council**

The Reeve is required to fulfill the foregoing descriptors of a Councillor and also fulfill those of the chief elected official. (We have provided Council and management with a more in-depth examination of these roles in a **Background Report** which will supplement the primary focus of this Report). These requirements are set forth in law as follows:

***General duties of mayor or reeve***

*93(1) In addition to performing the duties of a councillor, a mayor or reeve has the following duties: (a) to preside when in attendance at a council meeting unless this Act or another Act or a bylaw of council provides that another councillor is to preside; (b) to perform any other duty imposed on a mayor or reeve by this or any other Act or by bylaw or resolution. (2) The mayor or reeve is a member of all council committees and all bodies established by council pursuant to this Act, unless the council provides otherwise.*

The Reeve is recognized locally and across the Province as the ***chief elected official*** of the municipality. This is a position of honour and perceived authority. When the Reeve speaks, it is presumed by most that he speaks for Council as a whole. If he makes a commitment, even if unintentionally, residents believe that they are hearing the voice of Council.

The Reeve does not have the authority to direct the CAO, the Manager of Public Works or the office assistant/receptionist. The first (the CAO) is under the direction of Council, which is a body of seven members. The rest of the organization take their marching orders from the CAO or at least, that is the way this is supposed to work.

While not a requirement, some consideration should be given to the Reeve being the last person to speak to a matter on the agenda and not the first. In that manner, he can hear the opinions of his colleagues without divulging how he sees the matter. His voice then has much more clout when it is offered after his colleagues have spoken.

Although the role of a Reeve is to be the **political leader of the Council**, it is also often the case that both the Council and administration expect the Reeve to provide a linkage between the legislative (Council) and administrative (staff) arms of government.

In part due to his position as leader of Council and in part due to the more frequent presence, the Reeve is expected to be **Council's main spokesman to the administration**.

The Reeve is also expected to strive for consensus where that may be found but to appreciate democracy only requires four people (i.e., the majority of seven Councillors) to consent on any issue. The Reeve should attempt to draw the views of his colleagues together and to point out a reasonable compromise if one exists.

The Reeve is also expected to be the **key representative of Council** in meetings with other municipalities (unless delegated to another member of Council) and the Provincial and Federal governments. Any liaison on a political level should normally be conducted through the Reeve's office. Discussions on an administrative level should, on the other hand, be carried out by the CAO.

- **Council and Councillors**

“Council” refers to the Reeve and Councillors. We believe that the legislation requires the Council to act on behalf of the residents and businesses of each community (urban and rural). We also believe that the legislation assumes that those elected to Council will think for themselves and will speak and vote as their conscience dictates.

One of the key tenets of local government is the fact that **power is vested in the Council as a whole** as opposed to its individual members. Thus, no one member of Council has any legislated authority to commit Council to any particular action. Power is wielded by Council who meet at pre-established times in regular meetings to discuss the issues placed on the agendas most frequently by the CAO and staff and in the form of delegations as requested by the public.

We recognize that each Council is made up of a variety of personalities and individual interests. Generally speaking, Councils come at each issue with often very different perspectives. The key to the success of any Council lies in its ability to make **democratic decisions while respecting the right of individuals to differ**. A healthy Council tolerates dissent and listens carefully to the views of each other. Contrary opinions are respected and once a decision is made, the administration is empowered to move the matter forward as action.

- **Council Mission, Vision, Goals, Priorities**

If the RM is to have a clear sense of where it is heading and what issues it wishes to address over a particular time frame, Council must articulate that direction (in conjunction with and with the input of its administration). Once Council outlines what it sees as the vision, goals, objectives and annual priorities for the RM, those should set the stage for subsequent actions by the administration. The latter must ensure that Council's vision is captured by this and successive budgets and business plans.

Council established a Mission Policy on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2019 which states as follows:

*Our mission is to maintain and enhance the economic, cultural and social well being of our ratepayers. We strive to accomplish our mission by providing services to the public which cannot feasibility be achieved individually such as transportation, protection, environmental, public health and welfare, economic development, recreational and cultural services for the benefit of the public as a whole.*

- **Impact of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO)**

We are cognizant of the tremendous impact that a CAO can have on the organization as a whole and on Council's governance functions. The CAO is Council's "go to" person in terms of placing its plans and policies into action. The CAO (see **Background Report #3**) is also the key administrative person who sets the tone for the staff and who acts as their guide and mentor relative to how management and administration ought to be practiced. The CAO fulfills many roles including:

- ❖ Experienced, educated, professional policy advisor to Council
- ❖ Team leader of the administrative body
- ❖ Champion of the administration; mentor
- ❖ Conduit of Council decisions to administration
- ❖ Approval authority for administrative actions
- ❖ Implementer of Council decisions
- ❖ Quality control of advice up & action down
- ❖ Partnership builder; liaison to administrative colleagues.

- **Council-CAO Relationship**

The relationship of the CAO to the Council is highly dependent upon ongoing feedback and communication. This has to be open and honest or little change will be made when that is needed, and the relationship will become fractured. It is essential that it be **based on professionalism, clear understanding of roles and expectations and that it be founded on trust and respect.**

The relationship between the Council and CAO will also impact how the public perceives the latter. Where Council is expressing confidence in the judgment of the CAO, the public is more likely to feel that the two are working well together and seemingly on the same page.

Similarly, the CAO needs to carefully monitor his/her rapport with the public and ensure that everything is being done in a professional and friendly manner. The approachability of the CAO will be a strong determinant in the public's degree of confidence and trust.

- **Tone at the Top**

We have written extensively regarding the impact that those at the top of any organization have on how the rest of the organization function. This “**tone at the top**” is expressed in many ways including style of management meetings, degree of camaraderie in the office, personal regard for each other, degree of respect in communication with the CAO, degree of informality (and formality) in contacts with the CAO, flow of information. **The style of the CAO impacts** the openness that staff members feel in providing feedback and input in terms of how the organization is functioning and what they see as the strengths/weaknesses of administration. It is not healthy, in our opinion, for individual members of Council to approach staff below that of the department head level to seek answers to their questions. While this advice might appear to be restrictive, Council members need to understand that their inquiries may be such that the most comprehensive and accurate policy response is most likely to be that which they are able to access from the two top levels of the administration (i.e., CAO and department heads). It is at the top of the administration that a Council should be guaranteed of receiving unvarnished information.

- **Operational and Capital Budgets**

Not much of significance happens in any municipality that is not provided for in the approved operating and capital budget. The authority to approve both of these documents rests with Council. While the run-up to the presentation of budgets can be extensive in terms of the time commitment of the administration, the focus of Council's energies must be on the front and back ends of the process. The front-end focus lies in Council's involvement in the strategic planning process whereas the concluding chapter lies in Council's review and approval of a capital and operating budget and resulting tax implications.

- **Policies & Bylaws**

There are a number of significant documents which guide how the RM is to function. Obviously first and foremost is the legislation which we will refer to throughout our Report. The



**legislation** provides the basis of the RM in terms of what it is to do and, in many ways, how it is to function.

As we pointed out earlier, Council has a significant responsibility through its governance role in the approval of new or revised **policies and bylaws**. These are the principal documents that guide the actions of a municipality and provide the residents with the clarity they need to understand what is permissible by them and their neighbours and what is not. **Policies** set out this Council's views and/or decisions on particular issues (generally **those which are significant or likely to repeat**) and are intended to guide the decisions and actions of the administration. The adoption of a policy mindset by Council is central to ensuring that Council sticks to its role and does not interfere in the day-to-day work of the administration.

### **Council Principles**

It is our view that Council would benefit from a “principle” based approach to its decisions. Such principles are intended to cause Council to reflect on what is important in terms of how it is viewed as the leadership body for RM residents.

#### **We see these principles as follows:**

1. The Council will exercise its independent authority with respect to setting the municipality's vision & priorities, assessing the CAO, meeting with the external auditor, passing bylaws, policies, resolutions.
2. Decisions will flow from a sound understanding of Council's governance role based on a thorough orientation.
3. Council will voice their views before a decision is made & will respect the results of the democratic process (i.e., when a decision is made, it's made. New information of a tangible nature would have to be introduced in order to cause the Council to re-visit a decision).
4. Council will approach all decisions with an open mind (i.e., decisions are not made before the meeting; they are made at the Council table and in a Council meeting).
5. Decisions will be based at least in part on the comprehensive, apolitical administrative advice from the CAO. Decisions will not be made by Council

- “winging it” but with the back-up of a quality management report signed off by the CAO. Council is, however, under no obligation to adopt any report or recommendation of the CAO.
6. All members of Council will receive access to concurrent information on decisions & policy issues. There will be no evidence of one member of Council getting preferred access to issues/decisions/announcements.
  7. All members of Council are elected as co-equals. All are entitled to participate in the decision process. This does not negate the fact that in certain instances, the Reeve might have access to information before the rest of Council, but he shall be under the obligation to share such information in an expedient fashion with the rest of Council.
  8. No external agency, board or committee (otherwise referred to as an ABC) created by this Council will be delegated decision-making authority unless permitted by legislation & by Council resolution.
  9. Council’s decisions will flow from a policy framework wherever that is reasonable and applicable. That is, if the issue is significant, the CAO will draft a policy statement on the issue for Council’s review and approval.
  10. Decisions will be made in a transparent manner unless required to be otherwise protected by law (i.e., in camera).
  11. Public participation will wherever possible and timely be encouraged in key Council decisions; all decisions will reflect “what is best for the RM as a whole”.
  12. The Reeve will ensure full Council awareness of any proposed policy or public announcement; all Council members will be uniformly well-informed.
  13. The CAO’s authority over all staff will be respected; questions to administration at Council meetings will be directed through the CAO.
  14. A request for information to the CAO or other staff from one Council member triggers a response to all members.
  15. Council will be briefed regularly by the CAO on progress on key issues.
  16. The Reeve is regarded/respected as the official spokesperson on behalf of Council.

- **Public Responsiveness**

The public generally expect their civic services to be user friendly and designed in such a way to make visits to the RM office as stress-free as possible. They are not expert in how the RM is structured but do know that their concerns and ideas should be welcomed by the administration. The senior management need to be aware that the public is the client and that its expectations of quality service should be forefront for any management team.

It is often the fact that ratepayers are more likely to simply reach out to their elected representative for their ward or to the Reeve to get the answer to their questions. Regardless of efforts to the contrary, expecting them to direct their queries to the office may not be successful.

- **Direction and Supervision**

While sometimes overlooked in the busyness associated with being a department head or supervisor, senior staff has an obligation to provide effective direction and supervision such that employees understand their roles and carry them out effectively. This requires managers to identify those tasks that need to be done and completed in a timely manner; to ensure that all positions are clearly described and positioned on the organization structure; to supervise the day-to-day activities of each department, and staff position; to encourage employees to follow safety/health procedures; and to be mindful of social media policies and be courteous to any members of the public with whom they have contact.

- **Ensure Adequate Staffing**

Part of the task of the CAO and senior management is to ensure that the organization is appropriately staffed to meet the objectives and needs of Council and the community. One of the mandates of a CAO is to assess, on an ongoing basis, current resources and determine whether the RM is receiving value for money. Given the significant impact that employees have on the costs of any organization, the Council needs to be aware of any change to the number of full-time employees and the incremental costs involved.

A significant expectation of management is that they maintain a suitable structure and back-up resources internally such that their absence or departure is not marked by chaos as employees try to figure out who is in charge. It is neither reasonable nor possible for a supervisor to provide good guidance to more than say seven direct reports or to ensure that

they are being properly deployed. For example, in this context, and without necessarily increasing the number of employees, the RM could add supervisory duties to one or more seasoned employees in Public Works, or by elevating the positions in the office to more of a management structure.

- **Assessment and Training**

Part of the mandate of a CAO is to ensure that the Council and the RM community are receiving value for money from their staff. We do not know how this can possibly be done without a formalized approach to performance evaluations. Such a process needs to be interactive such that all staff members have the opportunity to receive feedback and provide their input on their own performance.

Senior management is also required to assess the training and development needs of their direct reports and make adequate provision in budgets for training dollars to support the planned development of staff into more senior positions.

- **Orientation of Staff**

While it seems difficult to believe that an organization could hire new people without briefing them on the real nature of their work and why working in a municipality is different than the local lumber yard, it is unfortunately the situation in many municipalities, both large and small. If Council wants to be assured that its employees are representing it well, the CAO will recognize that a part of her duties is to provide a first-rate orientation to anyone coming onto the municipal payroll.

- **Ensuring Effective and Planned Communication**

Employees depend upon their senior managers to ensure that each has access to information impacting their work responsibilities. This requires that management hold focused, useful and **regular meetings with all staff** to ensure that they are apprised of any organizational issues or changes to policies with which they are expected to be aware.

- **Senior Staff Modelling**

Whether management recognizes it, they ought to ensure appropriate behaviour in the workplace. Support staff often identify with a particular manager as a mentor, and try to pattern their behaviour after such a person. This requires that senior staff be ethical in all

their dealings; use public resources carefully given their stewardship position; communicate issues and concerns fully and promptly to staff so that they find out such things from their supervisor and not via social media; refrain from any sexual innuendo or inappropriate contact or the consumption of alcohol on public premises; treat their employees and employer with respect.

- **Employee Morale**

While not a management practice, organizations do not function very well if those employed are not working relatively harmoniously with those who manage their functions. Members of administration respond to their leaders if they perceive those in authority to be supported by the level above them (and so on). Leadership and the moral authority to act do not arise simply because of position.

### **Section Three: Summary of Surveys/Interviews**

We heard a wide variety of feedback from those whom we surveyed/interviewed. While our Report seeks to address many of these issues, not all fit within the scope of our terms of reference and some of the issues are highly dependent on larger matters being addressed (i.e., if these are addressed satisfactorily, the lesser issues will tend to fade). We summarized what we heard and blended certain comments to protect to the extent possible the anonymity of those interviewed. These observations are **presented in this section as solely the opinions of those we surveyed and interviewed and are not necessarily facts but, rather, impressions.** As blended comments, they are not intended to reflect those of each person but, rather, our summary of what we heard.

#### **Survey Responses (Summary: Council)**

##### **Roles of Council**

- Council members as a whole are confident they understand their roles as elected officials. According to Council members, these include:
  - discussing and approving the resolutions, bylaws and policies;
  - setting the annual budget
  - traveling and checking out the roads in their division (making sure they are in good, passable condition)

- dealing with any issues and concerns ratepayers may have and bring them forward to collaborate with the other councillors
- setting the direction for the RM
- providing the CAO with direction to set Council's goals in place through clear instruction via resolutions, budgets, etc.
- approving tenders
- discussing and planning improvements.
- Little has been provided to Council members relative to their roles; there was a certain degree of clarification through the 2017 Council training by Cuff, the 2020 orientation for the City and RM, and the Summit orchestrated by the CAO.
- Council expresses that it communicates with staff but believes that it does not manage them. They express that the CAO is the only role directly reporting to Council. Council states that they get involved in issues when asked to do so by the CAO through the agenda process.

#### **Orientation**

- Orientation was provided to Council from the CAO, through the Cuff training, and through SARM. This had a range of responses from Council as some found it useful, while others found it more of a lecture style on rules of the position.

#### **Strategic Priorities**

- Priorities have been discussed in terms of a five-to-ten-year plan, however the movement towards goals is seen as an ongoing target with little forward momentum. No consultant or advisor was used in this process, although an engineering company will be hired to look at problem areas and help set up a 5-year plan to address them. The road consultant and manager of Public Works (MPW) have also been involved in a special meeting to determine construction/transportation priorities for the RM.

#### **Key issues identified by Council are:**

- Communication between Council and senior management; roads (construction); the attitude of the office towards ratepayers; budgets; recreation; policing; the issues which residents have with senior management; more development to keep the area

progressing; beavers (this has been addressed through a program to decrease the population).

- The new Reeve has not served on a Council before and there are perceived issues regarding his background as a business owner and whether or not he will understand the distinction between this role and his role on Council. The sense to date is that the Reeve is very cognizant of his role as a public Council member representing the community and that he is quickly learning his duties.

#### **Governance Model**

- The consistent theme of inadequate information from senior management to Council emerged. Decisions are generally made based on the information provided but this is perceived as incomplete, incorrect, or misleading and, in the opinion of Councillors, causes poor or ill-considered decisions to be made.

#### **Managerial Advice/Competency**

- Ironically perhaps, the commitment of senior management is respected by Council, but they no longer have sufficient confidence. Senior management is seen as having a hidden agenda at times; cracks in performance are noticeable in the way staff are treated; there is a history of ongoing issues, and this puts Council in an awkward position with ratepayers frequently through misinformation and how senior management presents itself to the public.
- Valid, reasonable options are not always provided, causing decision-making to be perceived as more difficult than necessary.
- Research is seen as incomplete, details are missed, or information is presented in such a manner seemingly designed to save face or sway a decision.

#### **Relationships**

- Council members have a progressively improving relationship since the election of October 2020; the Reeve is learning his role and letting Councillors do their jobs in their divisions; open communication could improve the relationship, but this is a minor concern; issues are resolved in a respectful manner.

- There are meetings with only the Reeve and senior management in attendance. To improve transparency (and perhaps to reduce any unnecessary suspicions), it would be preferred that a couple of Councillors are present at all meetings.
- The relationship between members of Council and administration is respectful, yet faith is being lost in that Council feels that they are not always well informed.
- Significant internal issues facing the RM revolve around the senior management's relationship with Council, relations between outside employees and office staff, and the office's relationship with the public.

#### **Policy Focus**

- Policies are reviewed and updated regularly. Council has been presented with draft policies for revision as well as new policies. Council feels the senior management has been performing well in this area.

#### **Council's Progress**

- Council believes they have made great strides in team building. Council members feel that as a whole they are working towards becoming a good team.
- There are issues with the senior management as they do not work well together and are perceived as being somewhat evasive; messages lack clarity.
- Council needs to provide more clarity in its direction and then rely on senior management to delegate to the rest of the team; this process has appeared convoluted and misrepresented.
- Connection to the public seems to be an area of focus for Council through its outreach, gathering opinions, improving the RM based on what is heard, changing policy to allow the RM to work with the public, answering all calls and ensuring the public gets the information that they request. Information sessions are held through the year and information is posted on a Facebook page.

#### **Results**

From the perspectives offered by Council members, the desired results of this Governance Audit are as follows:



1. Council would really like to get the RM working as a team, but there are roadblocks to this. It is hoped that the third-party audit will help identify and achieve goals.
2. Find out what needs to be changed in how senior management functions. It is believed Council has not always seen them as transparent/honest.
3. Find out where there is breakdown resulting in the lack of work getting done. From a Council perspective, administrative leadership has been lacking.
4. Anything that would make the team work more smoothly would be helpful.
5. Meetings between the Reeve and senior management should have 1 or 2 Council members in attendance to improve transparency.

**Responses from Management:**

**Objectives**

1. Convince this Council that it needs to listen to the advice provided in this Audit. This Audit should identify the reason why the RM is somewhat dysfunctional.
2. Establish the functions of the Municipality, the capabilities of each member of Council and staff, as well as to give Council and staff a better understanding of their roles. Enable Council to govern without it becoming too hands on.
3. Provide clarity to and for all staff and Council and the roles and responsibilities of each. Address the interfering behaviour of Council. Place Council's oversight clearly on the senior management; they are not responsible for managing staff; CAO is their only legislatively required employee, and she is also legislatively authorized to manage the rest of the RM's workforce.
4. Make corrections to what has become a poor work environment. Ensure that senior management has a better understanding of who has authority to do what.
5. Find ways to reduce the degree of paranoia about who is meeting with who and for what reasons.
6. Figure out how to make the best use of this Council. All the Councillors have strong skills that they bring to the table together with knowledge of their ward and relationships.

7. Place more reliance on those who have been asked to manage employees and do not interfere over small decisions; show more respect between Council and senior management.
8. Encourage Councillors to place more faith in the staff's capabilities; make thoughtful decisions; quit nitpicking daily activities; get away from last minute projects.
9. Improve the Council- senior management relationship. This impacts everything. Senior management needs clear direction and support by Councillors if they are to be able to do their work. This does not seem to be the current environment as direction is given and then frequently changed or micro-managed.
10. Enhance/improve role clarity and chain of command; create a more efficient/effective organization; staff and Council understand the need for each to complete their jobs without interference.
11. Create a positive and healthy work environment for the outside crews; team environment with management and Council to help the RM be more productive and become a positive part of the community.

### **Role Clarity**

- According to the position descriptions and structure, the CAO reports to Council, the Manager of Public Works reports to the CAO, the Public Works employees report to the MPW while the office staff, both senior and junior/subordinate report to the CAO. The CAO was hired by Council as a whole; the MPW was hired by Council and the CAO; other staff was hired by their supervisor and the CAO.
- Senior management is aware of their responsibilities; however, it feels as if their hands are tied by having to keep Council updated daily, causing them to fall behind in their work and become more stressed. The role of the CAO was not made clear although a position description was developed and approved by Council many years ago. Policies have been updated but this description has not.
- Other staff are not clear on their responsibilities, have not all received job descriptions; descriptions which have been provided have changed many times.

- In terms of positions being reviewed for changes, updates on the duties of the senior management have been provided to Council over the years which results in policy updates to the roles and responsibilities.

### **Orientation**

- After the election, the Council goes through a Summit (a 2-3 day briefing by the CAO) in order to give the new members an opportunity to see the policies, bylaws, agreements and other important information. This Summit allows the Council to meet the Managers and also the people who the RM works with such as the Fire Chief, EMO Coordinator and others. This allows Council to get information on what each manager and/or consultant does and their roles in the organization.

### **Leadership of Council**

- As might be common to other Councils, there are risks of fracture within Council albeit everyone appears willing to try to make things work. All want to be at the table when decisions are to be made and no one wants the Reeve to be in a preferred position to possibly discuss individualized projects with citizens.
- Council should be better briefed on all the issues.
- The CAO has direct contact with Council; the MPW has been told verbally and by email that he is to speak to the CAO before taking anything to Council.

### **Respect**

- The Council and Reeve are generally perceived as acting in a respectful manner to the senior management. However, the organization structure is not always followed nor is the chain of command. Council members have phoned staff to tell them how to do their job and manage daily tasks.

### **Policy Guidance**

- The issue of policy guidance has not been at the forefront; Councillors are generally more focused on day-to-day management (i.e., which roads to fix and what piece of equipment should be bought or sold or fixed and how it should be fixed). They travel their roads so they can advise the MPW where a road needs attention and in some cases - how to fix it.

- While the Council appears more interested in the day-to-day functions of the municipality rather than policy issues, it may well be that Council does not fully understand the impact of clear policies.

### **Powers of Council**

- Members of Council seem to understand what senior management's role is and at times seem to respect their job requirements; at times appear to question the degree of delegated authority and the ability of management to get the job done.
- Some Councillors are still trying to run things with the MPW instead of bringing concerns to the CAO first (e.g., construction projects, day-to-day maintenance); they may not recognize that this undermines role clarity.
- Management does not see Council as being on the same page; and feel that some are not concerned about whether they are overstepping their responsibilities.

### **Council's Progress**

- There is a general sense by Council that it has made some progress during the term to date. They feel like they get along well with each other and are respectful of the work which each one does.
- A "did you know" is being developed for the local papers in order to give some information to the public about what the RM does.

### **Challenges Facing Council**

From an administrative perspective, there are a series of challenges facing this Council. These were described as:

- unity as a Council and with management
- how to correct the relationship between senior management
- expecting senior management to show administrative leadership and build a team
- understanding of municipal finances
- allowing the managers to manage
- absence of teamwork, trust and leadership, consistent behaviour and direction in order to move efficiently forward, and
- the ratepayers' negative impression of the RM.

In order to be successful, Council needs to:

- see more trust between members
- continue to reference current policies
- trust managers to do their job
- improve communication and accountability
- be truthful, provide information as needed
- allow the professional people hired to do their respective jobs and help them to do it to the best of their abilities.

#### **Council's Value to Management**

- There is a belief that Council could add value to senior management by providing more/better guidance with respect to their budget & policy expectations.
- Council's value would also increase if it would delegate to senior management the management of the operations within the parameters of the approved budget and policies. Council could add value to senior management by giving them clear, consistent direction that does not change from meeting to meeting, or from season to season.

#### **Management Issues**

- There has been little focus on training by the RM of Meadow Lake. Training for senior managers has been on their own time, through previous experience, or on the job training.
- In terms of orientation to roles in the organization, the bulk of this comes from previous experience and learn-as-you-go. There has not been any planned orientation by senior management for new employees.
- Management understands that the role of Council is to set budgets, policies, bylaws, plans for infrastructure developments, and the needs of ratepayers and work within the parameters of legislation.
- Senior management believes that Council should be actively involved in the community & politics and leave the day-to-day work to the management. The CAO's role is to assist Council with legislative information and to run the ongoing business of the RM. The

CAO is responsible for the overall operations of the municipality and to hire the personnel to complete all the jobs necessary.

- These roles seem well understood by management and to a lesser extent by Council. Where these roles become muddled is when senior management invites Council to get involved in the hiring (e.g., MPW) and then questions who is accountable if that decision appears to be going off the rails.

### **Supervisory Direction**

- It can be challenging to get clear direction from Council when they are reported by senior management as regularly changing their minds.
- Council is not to direct the senior management's day-to-day activities, but they tend to involve themselves in how to manage staff. Senior management provides direction if something needs to be done right away - other than that senior management relies on staff to do all their work on time.
- Direction is often reported as unclear and changing regularly for outside staff; that direction comes from senior management, and not from a direct supervisor.
- Management could be of greater assistance to Council by working through the CAO and giving information on what policies could be made better in their departments.
- There are varied perspectives on the calibre of work being done by senior management i.e., office staff being more supportive, others more critical. The question is: would more staff would make any difference to the quality and quantity of work being done.
- Since the announcement of this Audit, office staff have started regular meetings; often staff meet for a coffee to start their day. Outside staff say when Audit was announced shop staff meetings began with the MPW & CAO.

### **Outstanding Issues**

These are not listed in any particular order:

- RM administration needs to enhance its trust, honesty, and accountability; this organization has been disadvantaged by an absence of role clarity, respect and not enough teamwork.

- Council tends to get too involved in administrative issues (i.e., those which directly impact the shop).
- More people are needed in the office; programs have changed; new programs have been implemented; and expectations from ratepayers that want things done yesterday have increased in the past 20 years. Council seems reluctant to add more staff to the office.
- There is considerable angst relative to the ongoing impact of senior management; management has felt threatened on issues which have often been misunderstood.
- Administration gets the sense that when Council considers a bylaw, they do not always plan to subscribe to it. Some of the issue lies with Council pushing policies and “new ideas” that may not be well planned.
- Senior management gets frustrated with Council and may express that frustration at inappropriate times and in front of other staff; it is difficult when Council wants to control everything and is in the office daily.
- It is believed by some that Council and senior management are heading in the right direction to resolve the above noted issues; the opinion of others is quite different.
- According to senior management, the administration is generally working well to serve the residents; there is recognition that there needs to be more evidence of rapport/respect between office management and Public Works.
- The Council has very good thoughts and they want what is best for the RM but are hindered by senior management’s attitude. According to office staff, the management team is doing the best they can and senior management is trying to work as a team. Regardless of any problems, both the CAO and MPW do want good outcomes from their objectives; they want to do good for their ratepayers.
- The consensus by residents seems to be that the RM as an organization is not functioning as it should. The focus of their displeasure seems to be on senior management and the belief that they have limited PR ability and limited respect among the residents.
- Listening to the concerns of the ratepayers and doing the best to make positive changes is necessary to move forward. The overall impression of progress and issues varies greatly between office staff and public works.

## How to Move Forward

*What do we need to recommend which will enable the RM to move in an improved direction? What results coming out of this Governance Audit with Cuff & Associates Ltd. would be useful in your opinion?*

- At least some of senior management do not think that things are going to change; atmosphere in the organization is so entrenched and the Council feels that they need to lead the staff instead of leading the community; there is a fear that change will be constrained until Council has the confidence to lead through their senior management.
- Council and Reeve need training to better understand their roles, responsibilities and their rights in this governance body; each Councillor needs to exercise their right as a municipal elected official with the best intention for their division as well as the whole RM; there needs to be accountability, guidance and unity; some believe that any change requires clarity as to who has what role when attending meetings of Council.
- It is obvious that we need better direction, more clarity as to roles; a better work attitude; less undermining, rumours or negative commentary; senior management needs to put teamwork for the betterment of the RM ahead of ego; needs to build on accountability and respect.
- Incorporate an understanding of daily activities into policies and new programs; will take time and a whole lot of effort, but it would be worth it. Also, more respect needs to be shown between Council, senior management, and the importance of the chain of command. That authority needs to be reinforced.
- In order to move in the right or improved direction, set a budget that is reflective of a changing environment and the increased costs that are impeding our operations; secondly, Council needs to understand that the day-to-day activities are the responsibilities of the management team, and that Council should trust that their managers are doing what is best for Council and residents; and thirdly, Council concern themselves with more input into the budgeting and policy programs.



**Section Four: Our Observations & Findings****Understanding Governance**

It is our sense that there is a general awareness by this Council as to the distinctions that exist between governance and administration. While it might be argued that Council has not always reflected this awareness in its behaviour, we believe based on our interviews and Council's responses to our survey questions, that Council recognizes that it is not elected to manage. This perception needs to be reinforced by management in everything they do. While our earlier seminar/debriefing session may have added some clarity to Council's thinking in this regard, this role separation will only become part of the Council's ongoing mindset if it is being lived out/modelled by the CAO and staff. If an item is on the agenda, it is reasonable to believe that Council is being asked for its opinion. If senior management believes that it has been granted the authority to decide the matter, do so; there would obviously not be any need to ask Council for its approval a second time.

As the governing body, Council's focus is on setting the right direction; making policy choices. It will not be able to do so if the information and subsequent discussions are focused on issues which a management team should be able to identify and resolve. This deliberate mixing of governance and management issues is certain to draw Council into territory which it does not need to inhabit.

**Governance** refers to

*“The process of exercising corporate leadership by the policy-making authority, on behalf of the public, to the organization as a whole, in terms of its purpose, control and future while ensuring that the organization's mandate is achieved”.*

The administration understands that it has a principal role in developing Council's awareness of how it adds value to the process through leading on the key issues. Issues that the administration tables with Council should always be assessed from the vantage point of looking for the governance implications and why Council's direction is needed. Where the CAO believes that Council ought to be made aware of her decisions, she should be providing Council with simply a statement of information on the topic.

We further believe that Council ought to be involved in exercising its governance roles in those spheres of responsibility which require legislative sanction or direction. For example, Council needs to be involved in the process of appointing its external auditor; in determining which law firm will provide Council with legal advice; what capital projects ought to be approved; what operational budget provides citizens with the best or most appropriate level of service; and so on. The key is to be able to distinguish with increasing clarity what issues require Council's direct involvement (as opposed to simply being made aware) and which are administrative in nature. Otherwise, role confusion will continue.

Council members are not expected to oversee individual projects nor drop into the office on a daily basis "just to see what's going on". Council members are expected to assure ratepayers that their concerns will be investigated. Each issue will be considered as to whether or not it needs Council's policy approval or an administrative answer from the CAO. Council members are not expected to immediately act upon every complaint they hear from the residents of their area but, rather, to ensure that such concerns are forwarded to the CAO for prompt follow-up and investigation as necessary.

### Approach to Policy Development

While we did not review each policy in terms of "do we agree with its content?" we were impressed by the fact that the RM is treating policy development in a serious way. The policies are being reviewed; changes are being made; Council members are involved. This bodes well for the future. The RM undertook a renewed initiative in terms of its approach to policy-setting in 2014 and established certain policies. For instance, Council adopted Policy #HR-000 "The Organizational Policy". This normally would be a solid step for a Council which wishes to be progressive, business-minded and clear. However, the wording begs the question as to who has authority for what i.e., "...the Council is to hire a Chief Administrative Officer (Administrator) **to help run the overall operations** of the municipality. The Council gives direction to the CAO as to what they require to have completed and the CAO directs the staff of the requirements". This section implies that Council provides all the leadership in setting out what is to be done leaving the CAO to point the staff in the right direction.

This does not spell out good management. The CAO is to advise Council as to what needs to be done administratively and will request Council to provide the policy direction within which the CAO will function.

The CAO, **once the policy/resolution/bylaw has been approved, has the responsibility of ensuring that it gets implemented** i.e., what the CAO needs to have completed and when. Leadership through clear policies is Council's domain and this depends on good solid professional advice by the CAO. Management is the CAO's domain, and this requires the will and capability to lead, guide, direct subordinate employees through their supervisors.

While on this same topic of "organizational policy", it seems questionable at best to find an Organization Chart attached which reflects seven positions reporting directly to the CAO when it is obvious that two are managers and the rest staff. The position descriptions indicate that the Assistant Administrator is a senior, seasoned employee who presumably could fill in during the planned and unplanned absences of the CAO. Office staff would normally report to that person. The second manager role is that of the Manager of Public Works who is responsible for supervising/managing the Works employees. A third management position in most similar organizations would be the Manager of Finance (or Corporate Services) which in your instance is the Financial Officer. An Office Intern is not management. Neither is the Bylaw Enforcement Officer or a Road Consultant or a contracted Planning and Development Officer.

### **The Impact of Relationships**

We can recommend any number of strategies in terms of how a Council should govern but all of that will come to naught if the participants are not willing to work collegially and in an atmosphere of respect. **The tools of governance are often not the issue: the willingness to collaborate is.**

The importance of what is referred to as "tone at the top" cannot be over-stated. The rest of the organization takes its sense of well-being and strength from the degree of consistency and cohesiveness that the top (both legislative and administrative) exemplifies. As a result, and while any Council may have significant disagreements on matters of policy, one of the keys to Council becoming more effective in its role lies in its ability to work together in a collegial, cooperative and respectful environment. This will only occur if Council has the desire and commitment to basic protocols and to collaborating on relationship building and identifying

its strategic direction. (The second key is the degree of trust which the Council has in its CAO as its chief advisor and manager of all human, fiscal and physical resources).

### **Some Observations on Governance**

- a) It is our assessment that the Reeve and Councillors are keen to perform their duties in an honest and upright fashion. All have impressed us that the well-being and interests of their constituents is what takes priority.
- b) Where Council has strayed into administrative matters appears to largely be a consequence of unrestrained interest in sorting out residents' issues, a desire to "help" the CAO and MPW resolve disputes or matters of turf, inadequate advice regarding purely managerial functions and the absence of trust.
- c) It is our assessment that the Reeve has embraced his new role and has been keen to add value wherever possible. He has shown a willingness to learn, including from this consultant, and has impressed his colleagues with his ability to take charge without rolling over them.
- d) This Council obviously has a keen interest in terms of the business of the RM and therefore often express enthusiasm depending on the subject at hand. In no instance have we found them disinterested and not keen to be accountable.
- e) It is our understanding that all but one of the Councillors participated in the RM's Summit which is a three-day orientation-style event. This is held following an election and appears to be a worthwhile effort in conveying roles, responsibilities, relationships and agreements with other organizations, relationship to key advisors like the Auditor and EMO Coordinator, RCMP Staff Sergeant, key policies, ongoing strategic plan, ward issues, construction plans.
- f) The involvement of Council members in the work which would normally be assigned to the CAO and management is of concern. As Council is mandated to be the governors of this system, it is expected to set reasonable policies that are fair and are being implemented by the CAO. For example, establishing a Mowing Committee (which comprises three members of Council and two members of management) to award a tender #087/19 brings the separation of policy and management into question and also underscores our concerns vis-à-vis who does what. If Council has

established a policy for the award of tenders and if management has sought tenders and is able to determine whether the tenders comply with their requirements, then it begs the question: why would a committee be needed to do the job of the CAO? For example, involving the Council in approving the position descriptions of non-management positions (Res. #220/19) is completely unnecessary and sends the wrong message to employees and to senior management. Having a policy which states that “the CAO will ensure that all positions in the RM will have a position description” would be the logical extent of Council’s involvement.

- g) The use of a standardized format for preparing Council resolutions and recommendations is intended to assist the administration in providing a succinct understanding of agenda matters and a recommendation for action. While we applaud the administration’s attempts to utilize this approach, the wording of a number of these leaves much to be desired.

## The Administration

### Office of Chief Administrative Officer

We have written in previous sections about the important role played by the CAO. This position is accorded a considerable degree of attention because of its prominence in the surveys and interviews, its expected role in the structure and because of the weight accorded to it by legislation. The CAO is both the chief policy advisor to the Council and the chief administrator for the rest of the organization. The CAO is expected to advise up and delegate approved actions down; and is looked to as the only person who will act as the lynchpin between the political (or legislative) organization and the administrative side. Such a role in terms of the success of the RM of Meadow Lake is critical.

Section 110(1) states that:

*Every council shall establish a position of administrator of the municipality. (2) A person who holds the position of administrator of the municipality must: (a) in the case of an administrator of a municipality other than a municipal district or a rural municipality, be qualified as required by The Urban Municipal Administrators Act; (b) in the case of a rural municipality, be qualified as required by The Rural Municipal Administrators Act; or (c) in the case of a municipal district, be qualified as required*

*by The Urban Municipal Administrators Act or The Rural Municipal Administrators Act.*

*(3) The administrator shall perform the duties and exercise the powers and functions that are assigned to an administrator: (a) by this and other Acts; and (b) by the council.*

*(4) Subject to the approval of the council, an administrator may delegate any of his or her powers, duties or functions to any employee of the municipality.*

The foregoing section points out four basic considerations: the Council is to appoint an Administrator; second, the Administrator is to be suitably qualified; third, the Administrator performs the duties as assigned; and fourth, the Administrator can delegate any of their powers, duties, functions.

The CAO is the principal advisor to the Council while being sufficiently confident to delegate some of that workload to her senior people. Further, the CAO is (or should be) responsible for recruiting and training the right senior people for their roles and is (or should be) accountable for their evolution as strong managers who can deal with the day-to-day supervision of their employees (without interference from either members of Council or by the CAO). Quite simply, if the Council sees the need to “help” senior management manage by “helping” them hire the right senior employees, then obviously Council has very little trust in the judgment of their senior management. This is a significant finding.

### **Accountability**

This whole system is based on individual accountability. Those in authority are expected to understand that they will be held accountable for a certain level of decision-making and to not expect that a senior role is conferred but no added responsibility is implied. For this reason, we totally disagree with Council “helping” the CAO to manage.

If you have the right person, they should be pushing back on Council or the Reeve if there is a sense that you as a Council want to interfere in their decision-making. When you recruit and hire a CAO, you expect that person to be able to manage effectively. If such a person cannot pick the right senior staff member during a recruitment process, then you likely chose the wrong CAO. If they expect you to make those types of decisions, they will equally blame you when the choice fails (as inevitably it will).

As difficult as it is, Council recruits, hires, assesses and praises (hopefully) their choice as CAO. If they make the right choice, allowing that person to manage without unnecessary

constraints is the way to proceed. This does not imply abdication. It requires solid and clear-headed policies which guide the CAO in terms of what decisions at that level are expected and what management practices are to be followed.

### **Delegate within Reason**

Every CAO understands that they cannot possibly do all the work required to manage and operate an RM. For this reason, they ensure that the organization is structured for success with an appropriate number of senior personnel who can manage the key functions (e.g., public works, finance, development). Further, a seasoned CAO will develop a succession plan for each senior role such that there is a go to person behind the Manager of Public Works, Manager of Finance and Manager of ? These might be simply small, two person departments (i.e., Finance), but still the role, title and position description will underline the expectations on these people to help with the overall RM management.

If there is a reasonable structure in place, the CAO will be able to delegate with confidence and mentor as necessary. Being reluctant to delegate does not fit such a picture as those involved will realize that little is expected of them, and career progression is always a long way off.

### **Recommending New/Revised Policies**

The CAO recommends policies to Council for its approval. The CAO would normally be expected to seek the input of their direct reports as to the content of any such policies. The MPW and all others would be expected to abide by the policies which is one of the reasons why they are part of the drafting process. Once policies are approved, naturally it is the task of the CAO to make sure they are followed.

### **Understanding of Roles & Structure**

We believe that all staff should be relatively clear with respect to their duties. Such duties will be described in their position descriptions which are supposed to be reviewed and approved on a regular basis. Staff duties once explained are lived out day to day. This tends to reinforce what the duties are and how they are expected to be performed.

We recommend that the RM adopt a standardized format for developing position descriptions such that these reflect a professional standard and are clear to whoever the officeholder is. These descriptions, particularly for a small office, need to be clear regarding general

responsibilities, reporting accountability, authority to hire/fire, authority to expend funds and to what limit, requirements vis-à-vis seeking bids and renewing or establishing contracts. As we read the position descriptions, these matters are not well-established and thus the fact that no one seems to have much clarity as to who does what and with what authority is not surprising.

### **Reports to Council**

We note that reports have gone forward to Council with minimal background advice or identified implications (policy and administrative). While the report recommendation format may be sound, the absence of any rationale supporting the matter leaves Council with little to discuss and enables the administration to simply put forward their own bias or experience on the matter. The CAO needs to ensure that both the reports of Department Heads and own reports are sufficiently comprehensive to gain traction with Council.

### **Senior Management Team Building**

The degree of team building by senior managers (if it could be said to happen) appears to be largely informal. The CAO meets with her office staff from time to time and the MPW meets with his crew as conditions permit (the work and the RM might be far-flung on any given occasion so meeting back at the shop can become difficult and time-consuming unless these are well-planned).

### **Training and Development**

We were advised that the supervisory staff members are encouraged to take related training courses. If approved by the RM, the employee is entitled to claim the costs of participating in such job-related courses. There is a budget established annually for each department. This is a mix of what is nice to have vs what is required by the position. The extent of funds set aside for this purpose is dependent upon the annual budget review.

### **Communication/Meetings**

Communication across the organization is relatively informal which we see as an outcome of the size of the RM. Meetings, as we noted earlier, are held for the office staff and only recently did these include the MPW.

If the management of the RM is to become as effective as they could, they will need to understand the importance of regular communication to all affected parties. Departmental



and management meetings should be held weekly or at least bi-weekly. These meetings are essential in terms of discussing what needs to be accomplished (i.e., work planning) for the next few weeks and also any problem issues. Such meetings are also helpful to developing a sense of interdependence amongst the employees. Further, proactive organizations understand that the “boss” is not the only one with good ideas. These can come from anyone in the employ of the RM as they encounter issues throughout the day which some energetic and encouraged brainstorming could resolve.

### **Direction to Senior Staff**

Council as a whole seems to understand that direction to the administration is to flow through the CAO and at least gives outward support to that concept. Internally, the message seems to be that the Manager of PW can be directed by the Reeve or individual Councillors. This bypassing of the chain of command is obviously not helpful to any organization which is trying to function in a professional manner.

At the same time, we understand that senior management are not necessarily on the same page and that their relationship struggles lead to an organization which commits in writing to a solid Council-CAO-Manager chain of command but in practice tends to bypass it depending on the circumstance and the moment. This occurs in part due to the flexible schedules maintained by members of Council who are known to stop by at anytime during the day and either hold impromptu meetings which regularly involve the Manager of PW with or without the CAO. This behaviour (regardless of how pure the intentions) places the CAO in a difficult position as even if she is included in the discussion, any direction given can be issued by the Reeve/Councillor rather than the CAO.

Sometimes a Councillor might simply contact who they perceive as the most logical staff member responsible for a particular file without realizing that there is a danger that a broader perspective that may be known to senior staff may not be incorporated into the advice placed before the Councillor by someone more junior. A communications protocol needs to be established to deal with this and related matters (i.e., who talks to who; who has authority to issue directives).

The CAO has communicated to the direct reports that she expects to be consulted before any action is taken but that is problematic if the staff perceive the Reeve or even a regular

member of Council as having more clout and therefore whose words will carry more weight. The notion, therefore, that the CAO is in charge administratively might sound fine and in keeping with the legislation, but the reality seems to be a much different story.

### Management Practices

The RM is obviously impacted by how Council's policies, bylaws and resolutions are being understood and how its services are being discharged. This requires that the administration is clear about its roles and responsibilities and understands how to work together in a collegial, respectful environment to ensure that the RM residents receive full value for their efforts. While Council sets the direction and in many ways the tone, the administration directly impacts this as they may have more direct contact with residents on a daily basis.

It is our view that every Council has both the obligation and responsibility to approve the senior level (i.e., the CAO and direct reports) of the organization structure (but not the hiring of any individual personnel except the CAO). This is important because it shapes where the organization will place its resources and who will be viewed as a senior manager and entitled to be at the decision-making table. Council also has a role in approving either the number of personnel or the funds established for personnel (or both).

With regard to compensation, Council also needs to play a role in terms of establishing overall **personnel and compensation policy**. This policy should set the framework within which the CAO is to function and make decisions around access to any merit funds for exempt employees.

- **Local Government as a Career**

One of the practices which would be useful for any **CAO and senior management is to strongly convey the idea that local government is a good career choice**. This could be promoted on the RM website and in any school presentations. There are training programs post high school and university/college which are available, and which should be encouraged. Otherwise, employees see this as a job and unless one is in a non-supervisory role that is not the message the RM should be conveying. This for some will hopefully be a career and this will therefore place some emphasis on the senior management to act as those in a profession and commit to quality management practices, which includes the need for ongoing education. Someone responsible for human resources/safety/benefits should also be tasked with finding the

relevant course information and keeping that in the forefront of your employees (e.g., the SARM MLDP course and the U of Sask LGA program).

- **Succession Planning**

It is discouraging to note that the RM as the employer has very little understanding as to the retirement plans of its employees. While any employee is free to change their minds and leave earlier or later than anticipated, it would be useful for the RM to have some inkling as to when it may face losing its key employees.

- **Observations**

In terms of the role of the administration and the impact which the management has on the RM of Meadow Lake, we note that the system has struggled as a result of:

- inadequate focus on role distinctions, authority and clarity; the impact of the recent orientation was obviously not absorbed by senior management as the line between management and governance appear to be fuzzy at best
- the gulf between senior management and other administrative staff is wide with little evidence of effective delegation of senior level tasks or duties to the Assistant Administrator or Financial Officer; the lack of an obvious 2IC in PW places the full burden on the shoulders of the Manager of PW who not only must manage his staff but also deal with the misinformation coming out of the office
- an organization structure which sends out convoluted messages about who is a senior staff member and who is a staff member
- unclear direction being given by senior management to “senior staff” and, as a result, no one other than the CAO and Manager of PW seems to hold much supervisory clout
- the office staff seem to get along with each other but are concerned about the gulf between themselves and those in PW
- a combination of public pressure and expectations as well as limited experience as an elected official and frequent interactions with management drawing Councillors into operational decisions, has resulted in their belief that their “job” is to take a direct sometimes daily role in managing whatever happens in Public Works

- the RM seems to have in their employ good staff, but training is not perceived as a priority by Council or by management (we note however that funds requested for this important building block are generally approved; the concept of training as being an important managerial function appears to be what is missing)
- not all staff understand how critically important their treatment is of those members of the public who come to the office or who telephone/email or text; office morale, treatment of each other and the public is picked up by their outside world and this has frequently been viewed as negative (according to those responding to our surveys and interviews)
- senior management in particular has been viewed by many as believing that the only appropriate answer to most queries is “no” and that any rationale to the contrary is not well-received (everyone, including those managing, needs a greater awareness in terms of how to be more diplomatic when dealing with the public); the public has to be recognized as “our employers” and thus they have a right to quality service and polite responses to any questions regardless of how repetitive or aggravating these might seem
- the belief that is held by some of the public with respect to the lack of responsiveness by the office may well be more folklore than reality but if communicated frequently enough, this becomes accepted as reality
- any orientation for staff is largely informal; this needs to be addressed regardless of the small size of the organization; the RM’s senior administration needs to put together a comprehensive orientation program for any new hires
- the budget process should be viewed as one that is open to the public from the inception of the process (i.e., once a comprehensive draft has been completed by management) to its finalized form
- the degree of financial information available to Council is seemingly limited; administration should check with other municipalities and determine how/what they present to their Council on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis
- the ongoing internal disharmony evidenced between the inside staff and Public Works staff must be laid at the feet of management; while that assessment might seem harsh,

senior management is responsible for the overall administration; part of their mandate (and expectations) is to build a solid, respectful relationship between the various parts of the organization; where there are difficulties between the senior management, these must be quickly resolved (we are advised i.e. the Summary of Surveys that they have not been)

- Council contributes to the disharmony by not insisting that any direct contact between it and the management of Public Works be orchestrated through the CAO; this may seemingly get results for Council, but it interferes with appropriate reporting
- regardless of the small size of the RM, there needs to be a suitable organization structure which encourages career progression, and which supports effective delegation.

## Recommendations

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### 1) Personnel Issues

- a) We recommend that Council review the Report on Personnel Issues submitted under separate cover and take the actions as recommended.

### 2) Handling of Report

- a) We recommend that once Council and the consultant have reviewed the Report, that Council accept it “for information” and ensure its distribution to all those who responded to the request for interviews and who completed the confidential surveys.
- b) We recommend that Council hold a special meeting to consider the Report and these recommendations.
- c) We recommend that an Executive Summary of this Report be posted on the RM website so as to be publicly available.

### 3) Council Leadership

- a) We recommend that Council meet every two weeks as a committee of the whole (named the Governance & Priorities Committee) to review the significant issues in order to permit a fulsome discussion without the pressure or expectation of an immediate decision on such matters.

- b) We recommend that the “role descriptions” for Council, Reeve and CAO as distributed under separate cover (and as supplemented by this Report—Sec.2) be adopted in principle.

#### **4) Orientation Process**

- a) We recommend that each new Council (and any new members who are elected through a byelection) be accorded a comprehensive orientation on roles and responsibilities; that the attendance of all members be expected at each orientation and that members of senior management also be invited; and that the Council Summit be continued in whatever format is deemed useful by the CAO and management at that time.
- b) We recommend that an orientation on good governance be offered at the outset of each term and that an external, experienced facilitator be retained for this purpose.

#### **5) Council Meetings**

- a) We recommend that Council expect to engage with the CAO, the Manager of Public Works and the Manager of Corporate Services (Finance) at regular meetings of Council; that the CAO be empowered to request the presence of her senior advisors/department heads; that they attend as needed at any other meeting of Council (i.e., the Governance & Priorities Committee); that Council and management sit at separate tables (which will help to underline the important principle that these are distinctly different bodies).
- b) We recommend that the use of a Request for Decision be continued and strengthened; that each RFD include a clearly worded final recommendation and signed off by the CAO; and that Council will expect the CAO to have discussed the RFD with the appropriate senior staff prior to its presentation to Council.
- c) We recommend that Council not interfere with the prerogatives of the CAO and management; that once a decision is made, that the CAO is presumed to have sufficient authority and competence to undertake the work without further “coaching” from members of Council.

#### **6) Role of the CAO**

- a) We recommend that the current CAO position description be revised (along with Policy GG-005—CAO) (a template is included in the Appendix) so that it clears up any confusion

as to who holds authority to do what. Council and CAO should refresh their understanding of the following duties:

- i) Ensure that the policies and programs of the RM are implemented
- ii) Advise and inform Council on the operations and affairs of the RM
- iii) Oversee and report on all operations of the RM and, in particular, direct and review the performance of all aspects of the RM, subject to the Act
- iv) Recruit and staff as identified in the Act and established in the budget process
- v) Advise Council and make recommendations...
- vi) Prepare and submit such reports and recommendations to Council...

These responsibilities are core to what this Council ought to be evaluating the performance of the CAO against in order to provide direction as to their expectations.

- b) We recommend that the CAO be responsible for the identification of resource needs (personnel) and recommend any changes to Council through the budget process.
- c) We recommend that the CAO be responsible for the recruitment, assessment and release of department heads.
- d) We recommend that the CAO ensure that all policies and procedures are clear as to where the responsibility for action lies; and that if the CAO is expected to undertake certain actions in response to Council's approved policies, that she is directed by Council to get on with it.
- e) We recommend that the CAO identify what training is required by her direct reports on an annual basis and ensure that the appropriate funds are set aside in the annual budget.
- f) We recommend that the CAO develop an in-house orientation process which ensures that any new staff members are properly and thoroughly introduced to the organization.
- g) We recommend that the CAO ensure that each supervisor/Manager hold regular meetings at least monthly (preferably bi-weekly) with their direct reports to communicate Council decisions, managerial directives, clarify ongoing (or new) issues and ensure that everyone feels as a significant part of the RM.

## 7) Organization Structure

- a) We recommend that Council members follow the organization structure (chain of command) which has been approved.
- b) We recommend that the CAO be requested to develop a succession plan for each senior role such that there is a go to person behind the Manager of Public Works, Manager of Finance (and/or Manager of Corporate Services). (These might be simply very small, two person departments (i.e. Finance), but still the role, title and position description will underline the expectations on these people to help with the overall RM management).
- c) We recommend that the structure be changed to reflect the following:
  - i) Manager of Corporate Services (formerly Assistant Administrator)
    - (1) Council secretariat/Clerk (duties could be assigned to the Manager of Corporate Services)
    - (2) Human Resources (contract or part-time)
    - (3) Grants Administrator (contract or part-time)
  - ii) Manager of Public Works
    - (1) Lead Hand Construction
    - (2) Lead Hand Maintenance
    - (3) Bylaw Enforcement Officer
    - (4) Road Consultant
  - iii) Manager of Finance (formerly Financial Officer)
    - (1) Intern

## 8) Position Descriptions

- a) We will recommend that the RM adopt a standardized format for developing position descriptions such that these reflect a professional standard and are clear to whoever the officeholder is. These descriptions, particularly for a small office, need to be very clear regarding general responsibilities, reporting accountability, authority to hire/fire, authority to expend funds and to what limit, requirements vis-à-vis seeking bids and renewing or establishing contracts.



## 9) Management Practices

- a) We recommend that the roles/responsibilities and authority of the CAO and MPW be clarified as per this Report.
- b) We recommend that the CAO approve all position descriptions with the exception of her own, which will be subject to the approval of Council.
- c) We recommend that the statement at the top of each position description “The Chief Administrative Officer will have the authority to direct all Personnel” be removed.
- d) We recommend that all business matters requiring the approval of Council be subject to a comprehensive yet succinct Request for Decision, developed by the appropriate department head and signed off by the CAO.
- e) We recommend that the CAO practice teamwork in support of her management and staff so that all understand what is expected in this organization.
- f) We recommend that all staff be made aware on an ongoing basis with respect to the policies of the RM. Such policies need to be circulated as soon as they are approved or where input is deemed to be useful, then a draft of relevant policies should be circulated prior to presentation to Council.
- g) We recommend that the CAO, MPW and Reeve discuss what would work best in terms of ensuring that the MPW is kept aware of resident complaints and Councillor’s input relative to their wards; Councillors are expected to be alert to the concerns of their constituents and yet not expected or permitted to require projects to be done or to supervise such projects; a balanced approach is needed.
- h) We recommend that Council (with the written advice of the CAO) approve a tendering policy which speaks to issues such as those accorded to the Mowing Committee; and that management be expected to function within the policy such that only tenders which exceed the policy be brought to Council for its approval.

Respectfully submitted,



George B. Cuff, FCMC  
President

