

# A City Council Creates Ends Policies

*Nowhere is governance reform more needed than in government. In this article, I continue with the third of my four-part series on creating ends policies—those policies established by the board that describe the results to be achieved by the organization, who is to receive the results, and the costs of these results. This time we will focus on the ends of municipal government. Let us examine the case of a city council with a mayor who operates chiefly as the chairperson and a city manager who is the CEO.*

CITY council members will point out that governing a city is quite different from governing a hospital, trade association, or social service agency. They are right, of course, though I do not believe the differences are as fundamental as they think. Let's review some of the differences. First, in common with school boards that were the subject of my previous ends article, city councils are elected by the general population. As elected officials, they are vulnerable to the whims, short memories, and expectations of the rest of us—the electorate. To cover that vulnerability, elected officials frequently adopt a number of behaviors that curiously we both demand of them and excoriate them for (pontification, simplistic solutions, and demagoguery). These behaviors, though they may be understandable, undermine effective governance. Second, city councils are themselves governed by higher governmental prescriptions about how they must operate, prescriptions that are antiquated and antithetical to good governance. Third, city councils have authority that goes beyond the right to govern their own employees; they have a portion of the state's "police power," that is, the right to govern the rest of us as well. This power lies in their authority to enact law (called *ordinances* in the United States, *bylaws* in Canada, and *byelaws* in the United Kingdom).

Nevertheless, when we get right down to the essentials, it is the city council's job, on behalf of a city population, to see to it that municipal government achieves what it should and avoids what

is unacceptable—the same as any other governing board. City councils do not erect stop signs, pave roads, process building permits, put out house fires, or mow the park lawn. Their staffs do those things, ostensibly in such a way that citizens get the governmental "products" or outputs that they want, for an acceptable burden of taxes, user fees, and losses of freedom (the costs of the city's results). To best represent the interests of owners (city residents), how can a city council best use its time, best focus its discussions, best discipline its process, and best frame its decisions?

Policy Governance speaks to all those issues, of course, and in this article I want to delve a bit into how a city council might establish the ends of city government. (The ends not only instruct staff, but form the point of departure for the council's subsequent creation of law. Laws force the environment to align with the vision for that environment.) So let's look at the city council's most engaging task, that of deciding ends, a task in which the council acts as purchasing agent for the public. In that endeavor, the council will describe (a) what amount of citizen cost should yield (b) what amount of results (c) for whom.

What is the broadest way the council can state the ends of city government that is still instructive and useful? To use shorthand, I will refer to this mission-level, encompassing ends policy as the "mega-ends" statement. Normally, a council entering this process will err repeatedly by falling into the age-old trap of focusing on activities instead of

results. The city council of Burton began with a number of such missteps, but had the tenacity to keep bringing itself back to the rigor of a true ends dialogue. For example, "To provide city services" was one of their opening missteps. There are no results stated; the city exists to aim its business (called services) at people. Services are not results; they are organized arrangements of staff activities. Services exist in order to improve citizens' lives. But in what ways are citizens' lives to be better? Specifying these is the central challenge of ends policies.

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Similarly, the Burton Council considered and discarded "to protect and to serve," "to operate a world class city government," and "to minimize taxpayer burden" as potential mega-ends statements. None of these describes the results for which city government is created. After a tedious struggle, the council agreed upon wording that covered all three elements of ends (results, recipients, cost): *The City of Burton exists so that residents and visitors in the municipal area have the essentials of pleasant civic life at a reasonable burden of monetary and personal costs.*

In the process of coming up with the wording above, council members argued mainly about "residents and visitors," "pleasant," "civic life," and the "monetary and personal" wording. As to the "for whom" component of ends, there was debate about including visitors as a

part of the designation. "After all," some councilors argued, "the city exists for its residents, not for others. To the extent that visitors benefit, that is merely a collateral effect—nice, but we wouldn't create city government for that effect." Others disagreed and won the vote, as did those who felt "residents" rather than "citizens" was the proper word.

The city council ultimately chose to state the mega-result of city government as "pleasant civic life," but "pleasant" and "civic" were arrived at only after lengthy consideration. City councils are concerned about safety, welfare, and other outputs of city government, and Burton officials finally agreed that pleasant life encompassed all such specific outputs. But councilors were unwilling to address city government to all aspects of pleasant life. For instance, individual wealth, family cohesiveness, and occupational success were not intended. So the council hit upon the modifier "civic" to narrow the scope of pleasant life. Similarly, "monetary and personal" were chosen in order to recognize that the cost of city government is not just taxation and other dollar-denominated burdens, but the restriction of individual freedom.

The resulting mega-ends statement forms the starting point for all further development of ends policies. So let's see where the Burton officials went from there. As was the case in previous articles in this series, the difficulty of "framing" further ends work comes up at this point. The accompanying sidebar illustrates what came out of months of work listening to citizens, considering staff input, and gathering information from other cities (some through Burton's membership in the league of cities).

Many of the issues that seem settled by the council's eventual ends language are still hot topics among residents in Burton. Environmental groups want a greater priority to be given to sources of possible toxicity, while a number of influential civic groups want even higher levels of personal safety. Some think the city should take on challenges now being handled by the economic development commission (a separate organization in

*(continued on back page)*

## CITY OF BURTON'S ENDS

*The City of Burton exists so that residents and visitors in the municipal area have the essentials of pleasant civic life at a reasonable burden of monetary and personal costs.*

- A. The city will be a safe, orderly, attractive environment in which to conduct commerce and to enjoy personal and interpersonal life.
  1. Persons are reasonably free from jeopardy to body and property.
    - a. Crimes against persons and property will be such that persons can enjoy outdoor activity without fear; safety in their homes; rights to maintain and use their property without fear of loss
    - b. Fire loss rate will qualify as AAA insurance risk
    - c. Human injury from animals is negligible
    - d. Flood damage probability will qualify for lowest insurance rates
    - e. No jeopardy from water run-off damage for other than 100-year flood conditions
  2. Environment is free from pollutants and refuse build-up.
    - a. No visible accumulation of trash or garbage
    - b. No toxic leakage or disposal
  3. Persons can move into, out of, and within Burton safely and efficiently.
    - a. Minimal intrusiveness with traffic flow consistent with safety
    - b. Clearly marked egress, ingress, and through traffic
    - c. Maximum safety for pedestrian and bicycle traffic
  4. Public spaces will be clean and inviting.
    - a. No abandoned buildings except as necessary to observe due process
    - b. City and neighborhood entrances clearly and attractively demarcated
    - c. Vegetation is in a controlled condition
    - d. No visible junked and abandoned vehicles except as necessary to observe due process
- B. Combined cost to citizens and visitors of taxes, user fees, loss of freedom, and other impositions will be no greater than that of comparable municipalities providing essentially similar benefits.
  1. Where user fees are levied, they will not be set above total, all-inclusive cost.
  2. The freedom of residents and visitors will be impaired only to the degree absolutely necessary for the achievement of public benefit, not for the generation of revenue or convenience of city staff.
  3. For 19xx and 19xy, property tax rate will be \$0.60 per \$100 valuation.
- C. City benefits are intended primarily for residents and, where any priority-setting is applicable, secondarily for visitors.

## Case in Point

(continued from page 3)

conflict with the bylaws, for the bylaws govern the board. If the board wishes to operate under the Policy Governance model, it is crucial that the bylaws at least not make Policy Governance impossible. Some bylaws provisions commonly found in North American nonprofit organizations do precisely that. But the question posed by this board is, can bylaws go beyond merely a passive support for Policy Governance? Can bylaws actually *require* Policy Governance, as this board wished to do? If so, how?

Yes, bylaws can do that. Just as bylaws can be written to require the use of Robert's Rules of Order, bylaws can require Policy Governance rules of process. But why would a board want to do that? Why not simply use Policy Governance? Why add the extra bylaws provision that *requires* its use? This board's main reason was that the extra

authority imposed by a bylaws provision could be used by a board as a mechanism to bolster its own resolve to stay on track. Another reason this board cited is that a bylaws requirement to use Policy Governance is a sort of meta-communication by the board; that is, it speaks to the board's way of speaking, which makes it a special enunciation, indeed. Board members felt that their hard-won discipline of Policy Governance would be less likely to deteriorate if it were grounded in bylaws.

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Their bylaws, as do most, had an article requiring the use of Robert's Rules of Order. Working together, we were able to commit the board to Policy Governance rules of process by the simple expedient of including such a requirement in the same bylaws article. Policy Governance is not codified in the severely inflexible form of Robert's Rules, so the board chose merely to cite the model itself rather than a specific authoritative publication.

Because Policy Governance is a registered service mark, its meaning is fixed; that is, referring to Policy Governance is not as imprecise as referring to some undescribed "policy governing approach." You could, of course, cite a single Policy Governance publication as is ordinarily done with Robert's Rules. If you choose to cite a publication, probably the most concise source would be "Principles of Policy Governance," booklet 1 in the *CarverGuide Series on Effective Board Governance* (John Carver and Miriam Mayhew Carver, Jossey-Bass, 1996). □

## City Council

(continued from page 5)

Burton) by adopting ends related to "diverse economic base" or "countercyclical business mix." Because water is provided by a separate authority, the council did not have to consider "potable water" as one of its results. In the same way, because the library is a separate organization in Burton, "cultural information base" or other values-added of a library system were not included.

Like the West York School Board cited in the last issue of *Board Leadership*, the Burton City Council felt uncomfortable in saying (in Section B) that the cost of city outputs is to be "no greater than that of comparable municipalities providing essentially similar benefits." In other words, do about as well as others. Rather than shooting to do better than others, this language ties Burton's cost-benefit to that achieved in other cities. The council intends to update this statement within the next year after further study of how to require either more achievement or lower cost. □

### SAMPLE BYLAWS PROVISION REQUIRING POLICY GOVERNANCE

#### Article X

Section 1. The board will govern using the published principles of Carver's Policy Governance model with respect to the board's internal process, its relationship to other entities including the staff, and its manner of decision making, except as otherwise provided in these bylaws.

Section 2. Officers, committees, and other functions of the board will operate in accord with the published principles of Carver's Policy Governance model, except as otherwise provided in these bylaws.

### TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

#### Fall 1997

**Policy Governance Academy.** A five-day intensive training for consultants and other governance leaders already knowledgeable in Policy Governance, October 27-31, 1997, Atlanta.

**New Board Member Orientation/Introductory Workshop.** Two-day introductory seminar in Policy Governance for board members and staff (no previous Policy Governance familiarity necessary), October 17-18, 1997, Atlanta.

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