

# **COUNCIL & STAFF: Building a Strong Partnership**

# Anatomy of a City Government

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

# Statutes, Charter, Ordinances

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

# Tools for building relationships

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

# Personnel Policies

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

# Potential for conflict...

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

# Data vs. Public Opinion

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

- John Nalbandian

University of Kansas School  
of Public Administration

# The Need to Function as a Unit

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



# Different, but Complementary

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

# Rule 1: the Golden Rule

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

# When Things Go Wrong...

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

# City Staff are Valuable

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

# City Council is voice of city

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## City Staff:

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

# Rule 2: Who's the Boss?

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

# Staff Relations Policies

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

# Ethical Dilemmas

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- A council member asks a staff member to work on a pet project.
  - Not okay. The member needs to work with the rest of the council to set priorities. Take it to council or work with the mayor or city administrator/mayor
  
- Staff is asked to work on a project that was not made a priority at a public meeting.
  - This diverts staff from their official “marching orders” and puts them in a difficult position.



# Conclusion

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