

These Changing Times – Responding Through Effective Organization Improvement

By Rick Taylor of Results Management Services

The Context – Development & Business Cycle

The cycles of life seem to be a fact of life – including business, community and municipal service cycles. During good times, revenues from high development application volumes, a growing property assessment base, and other revenue streams are well above the norm. Typically, staff struggle to meet increased workloads leading to increased staffing levels.

Accompanying the direct staffing to volume increase correlation is the tendency for program and regulatory growth to occur through access to increased municipal revenues and more available senior government funding. Long standing municipal needs (e.g. infrastructure), core services, programs on the “Plan B” list and new or updated regulations are undertaken with funding from higher than normal revenues or other not usually available funding opportunities.

True to form, the business cycle peaks and declines. Property development and other revenue streams decline creating funding shortfalls for core services, new or enhanced programs and regulation implementation, maintenance or enforcement. Property development forecasts wither into uncertainty and leave behind infrastructure to be maintained at municipal expense.

None of this is breaking news! The familiar multi-year development and business cycle has predictably repeated itself. However, it is important to have in place an approach congruent with Council and Corporate strategic directions and long-term goals to respond to current realities.

Responding to Challenging Times – A Systematic Approach

An assessment of value-added contribution is required for core services, programs, and regulations complete with clear performance expectations and management to those expectations. There are several key elements to a systematic approach; five are outlined below:

- **Core Service Review:** Identify core services noting sub-components of core services that “crept-in” during the up-cycle. Assess core services and confirm or eliminate sub-components, applying “value-for-money” criteria. Core service reviews can also include looking at service delivery processes for operational efficiency.
- **Program & Regulation Review:** Identify and assess “Tier 2” programs for validity and timing. Identify regulations that add little value. Municipalities are not staffed to enforce many regulations except by complaint. Assess regulations and where warranted, seek to eliminate those regulations not making a value-added

contribution. Ensure bylaw/policy provisions are consistent with senior level government regulations; this is not always the case.

- **Identify & Apply Performance Measures:** Follow-up the question “Are you doing a good job?” once answered in the affirmative, with the question “How do you know?” This leads to reflection for staff and managers not having performance measures in place. Ensure core services have clear performance measures in place to support evidence-based decision making supporting effective service delivery. Performance measures also meet provisions of the Community Charter.
- **Performance Management & Continuous Improvement:** Analyze performance measure data to identify opportunities for improvement. Workloads shift during down-cycles; resources can be shifted to higher priority core services.
- **Cost Reduction & Containment:** Analyze staff time usage to achieve efficiency. Department staffing budgets are in the range of 65-92%. Cost containment to ensure optimal usage of available time is a best practice. Absenteeism, overtime, call-out, lieu time accumulation, and contingent liabilities (e.g. unused credits) impact resource availability and service cost. Reportedly, personal use of the internet and the like averages 1 - 1.5 hours/day for office workers.

Concluding Comments

Implementation of a systematic approach to respond to the significant down-leg of the business and development cycle can partially mitigate the impact of decreasing revenues and the ongoing realignment of services to meet Council goals and community needs. The information gleaned through a systematic approach provides solid input to develop an updated Strategic Plan.

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