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WEBINAR 29FEB24

**Good Governance – in Pursuit of Excellence**

Host - Perry Kinkaide interviews George Cuff, life-long North American municipal governance consultant about the challenges facing municipal governments today. The response panel of Dawn Ringrose, Tim MacPhee, and Dennis Pommen round out the discussion as well as a few questions from viewers.

OVERVIEW

The complex challenges facing municipalities were discussed including the impact of provincial responsibilities being downloaded onto local governments, grant cutbacks, and the pressures of urbanization and immigration. The conversation highlighted the need for better governance education for council members, clearer role definitions, and the importance of municipalities pushing back against these challenges to focus on their core responsibilities. Strategies such as public engagement, regional collaboration, and standing up to higher government levels were suggested as ways to address the growing demands on municipal resources and decision-making.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. **Municipal Challenges:**  
Municipalities face overwhelming challenges due to the downloading of provincial responsibilities, grant cutbacks, and rising public expectations. Urbanization is draining rural communities, and there is difficulty in collaboration when survival is at stake. The influx of immigrants attracted by economic opportunities in Alberta and Canada is contributing to the challenges.  
  
2. **George Cuff's Experience:**  
George has extensive experience consulting for municipalities since 1979, working across all Canadian provinces and territories, the United States, and internationally. He has witnessed various municipal governance challenges and has provided seminars and consulting services to address these issues.  
  
3. **Municipal Crisis:**  
George discussed whether municipalities are in crisis, noting that the situation varies by location. Rural municipalities struggle with access to resources and relationships with neighboring municipalities.  
Urban municipalities face stress from taking on provincial responsibilities, such as homelessness, which they are not equipped to handle.  
  
4. **Good Governance:**  
Good governance involves making corporate decisions at the highest level and requires councils to set direction, determine priorities, establish key policies, and provide guidance to their CAO/CEO. Role clarity is a significant issue, with many councils not understanding their role and getting involved in administrative details.  
  
5. **Regional Governance:**  
The concept of regional governance is challenging to implement, especially in provinces with a strong sense of independence among smaller municipalities.  
  
6. **Orientation and Training:**  
There is a need for better orientation and training for newly elected council members to understand their roles and responsibilities. Some provinces require orientation within a certain period post-election, but the effectiveness and depth of these orientations vary.  
  
7. **Municipalities Taking on Broader Roles**:  
Municipalities are increasingly involved in areas like economic development and social engineering, often without clear mandates or resources. The panel discussed the need for municipalities to push back against responsibilities that are not within their mandate or resource capacity.  
  
8. **Collaboration Among Municipalities**:  
Collaboration is essential for addressing shared challenges, but it can be difficult to achieve due to competition and differing priorities.

9. **Cultural Implications:**  
Municipalities are dealing with cultural impacts due to immigration and the movement of populations, which requires understanding and inclusive approaches.  
  
10. **Homelessness:**  
Homelessness is a significant issue for municipalities, with many ill-prepared to address it. The problem has been exacerbated by the release of individuals from institutions such as corrections and mental health facilities without adequate preparation for community integration.  
  
11. **Municipal Accountability**:  
There is a concern about voter apathy and the need for municipalities to be accountable to their citizens. The panel emphasized the importance of public engagement and decision-making that aligns with the community's needs and resources.  
  
12. **Future of Municipal Governance:**  
The discussion highlighted the urgency for municipalities to adapt and improve governance in anticipation of future pressures, such as population growth and economic booms.  
  
**Conclusion:**  
The meeting concluded with an acknowledgment of the complexity of municipal governance challenges and the need for clear mandates, resources, and effective decision-making. The importance of public engagement, orientation for council members, and collaboration among municipalities was emphasized as crucial for addressing current and future challenges.