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IN RE VIEW

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

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● *Studies Completed*

LOW VOTER TURNOUT IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS— NO EASY SOLUTIONS

During the last municipal elections, less than one in three eligible voters actually bothered to cast a vote. While this statistic may overstate the situation because the municipal franchise is based on property ownership (so that one voter can have more than one vote), nevertheless low voter turnout has been the pattern for the past 15 years; this despite the trend towards increasing citizen involvement in the affairs of local government and increasing politicization of the municipal agenda.

A local council which is supported by, at most, a third of the electorate could have a questionable mandate, particularly when decisions on complex urban issues were involved or a strong voice to senior levels of government was needed. Recognizing this, and acknowledging that 1976 would bring both municipal elections and a revision of the Municipal Elections Act, the Bureau undertook a study to identify the reasons behind low voter turnout and to suggest ameliorative actions.

The results of our questionnaire survey indicate that, while there is no panacea for low voter turnout, because it is a function of a number of "technical" and "subjective" influences operating in combination, there are certain improvements to the process by which people are informed about municipal issues that could significantly reduce voter disinterest and apathy. The report specifies changes in media treatment of local issues, direct contacts between city halls and their various publics, and the educational system itself which would strengthen the motivation to vote much more than, say, moving the election date forward or backward from December, and in addition would increase the awareness of what that vote was about.

(11 pages: Published February 1976 — Comment)

IS POLICING THE PUBLIC'S BUSINESS?

In 1974, while undertaking a study of the Metro Toronto budget process, the Bureau was surprised by the brief and superficial review of the Metro Police Commission's budget by Metro Council. We immediately began to gather information about the rising cost of policing in Metro and elsewhere. The lack of sufficient control over the spiralling cost of policing led us to present a proposal to the Metro Toronto Police Commission to undertake a study on programme analysis and cost effectiveness. The Commission rejected our call for such a study but in the process we became familiar with the manner by which the Commission conducts its business.

Perhaps, we thought, by studying the management decision-making process we could gain insight in to the reason for the 155% increase in police expenditures since 1970. What we found was a system of decision-making that was so closed to Metro's elected representatives and the general public that few people other than the Chief of Police and the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners are familiar with the inner workings of the Police Force.

Our research included an examination of the police budgeting process, a series of interviews and a review of recent publications on the subject. We have assessed the problems surrounding the present system and made the following recommendations:

1. A detailed programme analysis and cost effectiveness study should be immediately undertaken by a body outside of the Metro Toronto Police Force.
2. All by-laws and regulations of police commissions should become a part of the public record.
3. Ultimate fiscal control and accountability through the budget approval process should be the responsibility of the local elected council in any community.
4. Terms of office for commissioners should be limited and commission chairmen chosen by the commission members instead of the Province.

(18 pages: Published July 1976— Comment)

THE NEWS MEDIA AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The purpose of this Civic Affairs is to examine the relationship between the news media and local government. Specifically, it deals with the news media in Metropolitan Toronto and the extent to which it serves the public and influences decision-makers on municipal matters.

This publication is divided into four sections which can be read, more or less, as separate units. Chapter I explains the local news operations of the leading newspapers and broadcast media in Metro Toronto. Based on information gathered from an extensive series of interviews, it describes the variety of formats and approaches used by the Toronto news media in covering local government.

Chapter II looks at the influence of the media on local decision-makers. Attitudes of our local politicians toward the press as revealed in a confidential evaluation questionnaire are described.

Chapter III is devoted to the results of the Conference on the Media and Local Government, sponsored by the Bureau of Municipal Research in May, 1976.

Chapter IV presents a case study of one recent important issue — the Metro Teachers' Strike. This chapter, part of which was published as a Comment in

April, 1976, shows that the behaviour of the Metro School Board during the teachers' strike can in large measure be attributed to the role played by the media. It confirms that trustees interpreted anti-teacher editorial and columnist statements as significant indicators of public opinion and it speculates that the press contributed positively to the anti-teacher climate of opinion.

The study concludes by summarizing some key issues concerning the existing news media structure and approach and the present coverage of the municipal scene.

PET CONTROL IN URBAN ONTARIO: THE MUNICIPAL ROLE

The purpose of the study was to gather information about how cities actually operated their control programs; their objectives, the scope of their service, their administrative set-ups, their costs and their results. We hope such information will serve as a guide to municipalities in evaluating their individual operations.

Questionnaires were mailed to 29 Ontario cities, including all cities with a population over 60,000, as well as to the humane societies that operate in these cities.

In our report we evaluate the results of this questionnaire and try to set "pet control" in the general context of federal and provincial legislation covering animals. We also examine the wider problems posed by the presence of animals in disease control, public health and safety, protection of wild life and the environment, the protection of animals from cruelty by humans, and protection of farmers' live stock.

The report also covers the founding, growth, present status and central role of the Ontario Humane Society, as well as the increasing public funds provided for what was originally an entirely voluntary humane society service.

We have tried to identify the chief problems of accommodating pets in our urban environment. The recommendations we make are largely common sense measures already found in some cities, however, the report should be interesting and informative reading for those interested in the many problems of pet control in urban areas.

(62 pages: Published May 1976— Civic Affairs)

THE ROLE OF THE MUNICIPAL AUDITOR IN ONTARIO

This Comment examines the existing role and functions of the municipal auditor in Ontario and considers why maximum benefit is not being derived from the present system.

Ineffectiveness of the municipal financial reports, insofar as the public or press is concerned, is attributed to the limitations placed on the auditor by legislation and tradition. His role has evolved into one of "attesting" to the accurateness of financial statements rather than of providing sufficient detailed information for potential investors or voters to assess the municipality's financial viability.

While uniform accounting and auditing standards ensure minimum standards, innovation or

development of more meaningful indicators of the financial state of the municipality are consequently not encouraged. Yet, auditors themselves may not be in a position to exert pressure necessary to improve financial management and reporting at the municipal level.

The Bureau concurs with Toronto Alderman Frank Faubert's suggestion that Public Accounts or Audit Committees be set up to receive and consider the report of the municipal auditor after which recommendations arising from the report will be sent on to the municipality's council.

The Comment also looks at the question of "tenure" of auditors, independence of small municipality auditors who may be auditing the same transactions they recorded, and the expansion of the auditor's role to possibly include handling management problems of local government. Such expansion will undoubtedly cause problems to arise, such as the question of upgrading of qualifications, and costs. However, the Bureau suggests that the efforts are well worth taking if the "development of strong, responsible, accountable local government" is to continue in Ontario.

(21 pages: Published June 1976— Comment)

● **Studies Underway**

The Housing Needs of Tenants

This study examines the housing needs of private sector tenants and the relevance of government programmes to these needs.

Sharing the Burden of Restraint

A case study of Hamilton-Wentworth on the impact of the provincial programme of fiscal restraint on certain social services.

The Tri-Level Process

How well do municipalities cope with the problem of relating to the senior levels of government?

Toronto Harbour and the STOL Port

Is there a better way to plan the development of the harbour than the confusing and stifling system now in place?

Local Government Productivity

An examination of several techniques for improving cost effectiveness in local government and the problems of information exchange.

● **Upcoming Events**

BMR is assisting the Community Planning Association of Canada (Ontario Division) in planning a Fall Forum on the difficulties of planning with limited financial resources. Tentatively set for November 7, 8, and 9 at the Park Plaza Hotel. For more information call BMR or CPAC at 869-1224.

BMR in Review is published every 3—4 months and summarizes reports completed during that period. Copies of these reports may be obtained by writing or calling the Bureau. The cost of reports is \$1.00 for Comments and \$3.00 for Civic Affairs.

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