



In Review

April 1980

THE PUBLIC INTEREST AND THE RIGHT TO KNOW (BMR TOPIC #9, March 1979, 24 pages)

This **TOPIC** is a summary of the one-day seminar on Freedom of Information held in Windsor by the Bureau, in cooperation with the Institute of Public Administration of Canada. The two major themes of the seminar concerned the relationship between local government and the media, and public access to information held by local government. The nature of this **TOPIC** does not allow for solutions to problems in these areas, although current practices are analyzed and proposals and recommendations are highlighted.

With respect to the relationship between government and the media, the Bureau concludes that, in order to preserve mutual respect between these two groups: reporters should not participate in discussions which cannot be reported; reporters as well as politicians should be better trained and informed; and the government should rely much less on the media to inform the public of its affairs. An information program may be utilized which makes use of, among other things, newspaper space, press conferences and releases, and radio or television time.

Concerning the second major theme of the seminar, freedom of information, the provincial legislation directing the handling by the government of requests for information is loose and ambiguous. This should be remedied. In addition, all documents available to elected municipal decision-makers should be made available to the public as well, with exceptions to the rule being few and narrow. Finally, Windsor's current practice of using very strict and limited criteria for determining items to be discussed *in camera* is strongly recommended.

PROCEEDINGS: GOVERNMENTAL RESEARCH **ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE**

(BMR TOPIC #10, June 1979, 32 pages)

This **TOPIC** is a summary of the proceedings of the 64th Annual Conference of the Governmental Research Association, held in August 1978 and hosted by the Bureau.

The purpose of the conference was to share experiences and techniques between the United States and Canada concerning urban issues. Because there was no concentration on one particular topic area, many subjects, including Metropolitan Reform, Public Apathy, Urban Growth, Ethics in Government and Cost Saving Innovations were covered. It is, however, a good general document for updates on what is happening in these areas.

Although such problems do not lend themselves to quick and easy solutions, many creative solutions were presented and future approaches to these problems were analyzed.

Obvious differences between Canada and the United States were explored, and it was concluded that the problems and solutions presented at the conference had a high degree of transferrability between the two countries.

In this **TOPIC**, the discussions that took place during the conference are recounted in session by session accounts and observations drawn from these discussions.

UNDERSTANDING METRO'S TRANSIT PROBLEMS (BMR TOPIC #11, July 1979, 25 pages)

This **TOPIC** examines many areas concerning the Toronto Transit Commission. The Bureau concludes that extensive organizational changes are needed to the present transit system.

This **TOPIC** examines and evaluates the beliefs that the Commission controls planning and policy decisions while remaining financially self-sufficient. The Bureau concludes that the lack of clear lines of responsibility and accountability have prevented such control over decisions. In addition, it is concluded that the TTC has found it impossible to remain self-sufficient since its inception.

As a result, the report puts forth the recommendation that the transit function be under the direct jurisdiction of Metro and should not be independent. This should be accomplished by forming a Metro Department of Transportation, combining the present Roads Department with the TTC, resulting in a new department with clearly defined responsibility for decisions.

In addition, the Bureau recommends that: the new Department of Transportation undertake a marketing campaign to assess demand and promote transit schemes; financial arrangements for transit should be based on the needs and objectives of the system; local areas and municipalities should coordinate decisions concerning transit with those of Metro Council.

COST SAVING INNOVATIONS IN **CANADIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS** (BMR CIVIC AFFAIRS, August 1979, 68 pages)

This **CIVIC AFFAIRS** deals with the reality, perhaps due to a poor information gathering and dissemination

sc 38 Box 3 file
system, that there is a definite lack of interest on the part of local governments in Canada with respect to cost saving innovations. With the assistance of funding from the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, the Bureau documented cost saving innovations underway in municipalities inside and outside of Canada. Canadian information was obtained by use of a questionnaire mailed to a number of municipalities in Canada, while other experience was obtained from existing studies.

This report investigates some of the barriers to local government efforts, such as restrictive funding and rising demands for service. In addition, present use of cost saving innovations was examined in centres across the United States and abroad, in areas such as public safety, public works and energy conservation. Based upon the returns of the Canadian survey, several selected innovations submitted are given detailed explanation.

Phase I has established a central compilation of current uses of cost saving innovations in Canada which serves as a reminder to politicians and civil servants that costs can be cut in certain areas of municipal service. It is concluded that this information is transferrable to some degree, and it can be implemented with less risk than originally expected. Phase II, which will provide a more in-depth analysis of a few selected innovations, is to follow.

PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

(BMR TOPIC #12, November 1979, 32 pages)

This **TOPIC** examines the closely related concepts of evaluating and improving levels of productivity and quality of working life in light of the pressure for restraint in public spending. Both concepts are defined and examined from a historical perspective in both the public and private sectors in the United States and Canada. Past experiments show that different approaches are being taken at different governmental levels and by various cities. This **TOPIC** identifies shortcomings in these two areas and recommends a course of action for the development of productivity and quality of working life goals in Ontario.

Canadian experience shows that all three levels of government have been dealing with the concept of productivity on their own, with municipalities lagging behind due to individual, and at times isolated, experiments and lack of adequate data bases.

In light of the information received from experiments on both sectors in the United States and Canada, the Bureau makes several recommendations which include: the Ontario Quality of Work Life Centre should expand its operations to the public sector, as well as making the public aware of alternatives to higher taxes and service cut-backs in response to the need for financial restraint; municipal councils should develop overall policy with respect to these issues; the Province should make municipalities aware of these issues so that experience may be exchanged.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES: WHO SHOULD PAY? **(BMR TOPIC #13, February 1980, 51 pages)**

With municipalities coming to the realization that resources are finite, it is imperative that their role in the provision of municipal services be reassessed. The potential of one source of revenue, user charges, is explored in this **TOPIC** by the Bureau. Municipal user charges are defined, and the extent of their use in Canada is shown. This **TOPIC** outlines the history of such charges and gives reasons for their limited use. Included is a questionnaire distributed by the Bureau in 1978, concerning current use of charges. Seventeen municipalities in Ontario responded to the survey, giving their attitudes towards charges, and documenting their use of charges. Two conclusions are drawn from this information; the use of user charges is quite limited; and there are only a few service areas where they are used to any extent.

This **TOPIC** explores these conclusions, giving criteria for implementing user charges, and presenting their advantages and disadvantages. In addition to this, theories and methods of determining the fees to be charged are outlined, as well as the use of such methods in Ontario municipalities.

Finally, the Bureau makes several recommendations concerning user charges, among which are: each municipality must determine a strategy to prevent any charges from being discriminatory; each service must be analyzed with respect to costs, benefits, social, economic and political factors, as well as policy goals; user profiles of services may be helpful; there must be a total rethinking of the provision of services and the implementation of user charges, perhaps accomplished through re-education.

DIRECTORY OF GOVERNMENTS IN METROPOLITAN TORONTO, 1979-80

This Directory is published every two years and serves as the guide to the cities, boroughs and metropolitan levels of government.

BMR in Review summarizes recently completed reports. Copies of these reports may be obtained by writing or calling the Bureau.

BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

73 Richmond St. W. Suite 404, Toronto, Ontario M5H 1Z4
(416) 363-9265