



MEETING NOTES
from
The Research Bureau

At its 29th Annual Meeting held on June 5, 2014, The Research Bureau hosted a panel of current and former city managers to discuss the qualities needed in an effective city manager. Jay Ash, current city manager of Chelsea, Bernie Lynch, former city manager of Lowell, and Mike O'Brien, former city manager of Worcester, offered their insights to an audience of more than 300 government, business, and civic leaders. D.M. Moschos, a partner at Mirick O'Connell and former assistant city manager at the City of Worcester, served as moderator of the discussion.

The panelists offered strong support for the city manager form of government. With more than a half-century of public leadership experience among them, the panelists stressed the importance of professional, non-partisan management of urban centers. They suggested that city managers, working with elected officials, establish shared objectives and implement a common agenda. The panelists emphasized the ethical foundation of city management and its historic resistance to institutionalized corruption.

The panelists offered the following guidelines for an effective city manager:

- Organizational Management – A successful city manager manages both individual staff and institutional bureaucracies. He or she crafts a vision and guides departments with limited resources and sometimes competing missions toward a common goal. An exceptional city manager attracts talent and facilitates organizational, not just individual, outcomes.
- Policy-making—An effective city manager analyzes issues and navigates the complexity of policy development and administrative implementation. He or she creates a consensus based on a strong legal and ethical foundation. Not subject to an electoral calendar, a successful city manager develops a long-term agenda and builds the necessary organizational and regulatory structure to succeed.
- Public Relations—A consensus-driven city manager has polished political skills, without being a politician. He or she works with elected officials, special interests, advocates, and residents to generate support for a comprehensive urban agenda.
- Financial Management—A well-rounded city manager has a strong understanding of public finance, building on internal and external professional expertise. Accomplished city managers form a team that understands financial constraints and works together to manage risk and growth opportunities.

Key Take-Aways:

- The city manager selection process should be transparent.
- Strong candidates will understand both urban policy and urban mechanics.
- Great city managers know how to work with people and organizations.
- Skill set is more important than zip code.
- Public involvement improves the selection process.