Things Really Can Get So Uncivilized

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“Welcome to Maplewood: The Twin Cities' Most Dysfunctional Suburb”

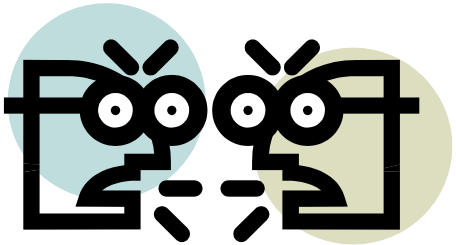
City Pages Magazine March 14, 2007

Background

- In 2012 League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) and Minnesota City/County Management Association (MCMA) Boards adopt “improve civility” as a strategic priority
- Joint LMC/MCMA Task Force of 12 Members – elected officials, managers, academics, others appointed and met during 2013
- Most were chosen based on their own specific experiences with severe incivility

Task Force Report Findings

- Contributors



- Costs

- Steps for local governments

- Recommendations for LMC & MCMA Boards

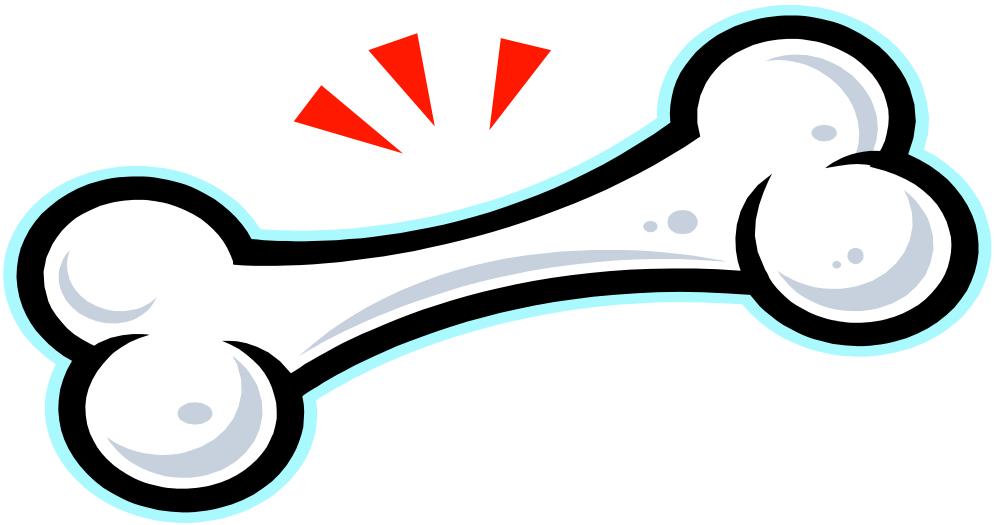
CONTRIBUTORS

Lack of community vision or conflict among visions

Specific land use development or redevelopment issue

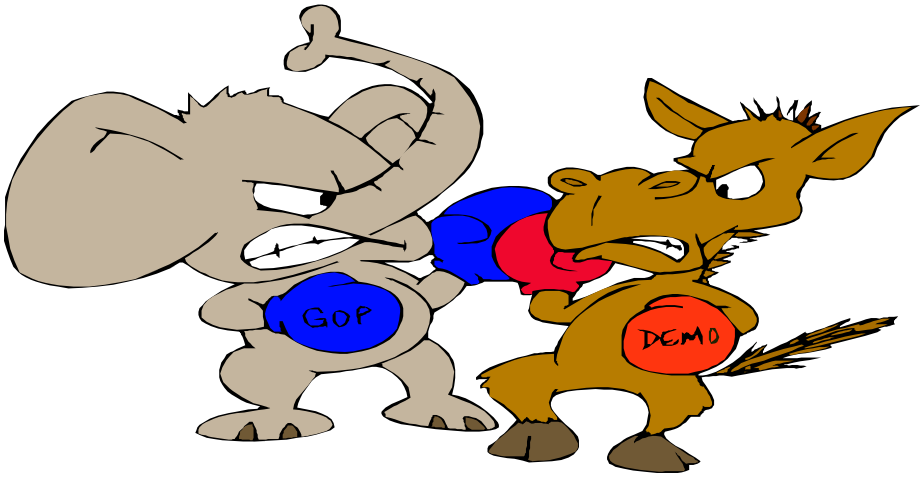
Financial crisis

Single Issue or Hidden Agendas



Coupled with lack of interest in the <u>full</u> responsibilities of the office.

Ideological commitment and partisan politics



Mirroring the behavior of national and state officials. Media focus on controversy. Social media trolls.

Role confusion and power conflicts;

lack of mutual support between elected officials and staff

Personal power and individual aggrandizement

And even clinical mental health disorders?

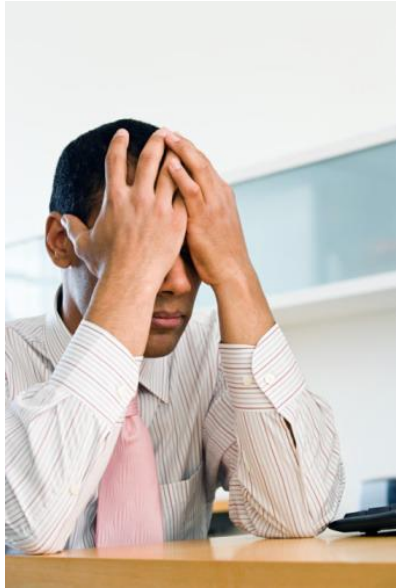
Illegal or unethical behavior by city officials

COSTS OF INCIVILITY

- Cities and counties can’t address routine business, much less new priorities
- Lack of citizen and media trust and confidence – city hall becomes like a bad soap opera
- Toxic environment in the community – everyone taking sides

- Chilling effect on citizen participation – who wants to be involved with that?
- Lack of willingness by “good people” to serve on the governing body or even a volunteer board or commission – “who needs it?

- Loss of talented staff that are fired or just resign in frustration
- Difficulty recruiting new staff that have the necessary skills
- Lack of interest by young people in considering a career in local government at all



- Loss of private investment, new businesses, grants, and lowered bond ratings
- Neglect of infrastructure investment and maintenance
- Neighboring local governments can’t work together
- State lawmakers reluctant to grant requests to the local government

- Action by the legislature or even Congress to mandate or preempt future local government actions based on the malfeasance of a few
- Local charter restrictions

- Personal health and well-being of local elected officials and staff
- And in the worst cases – violence!

Monetary losses

- Monetary losses usually related to personnel or land use actions
- Personnel related claims are a growing loss for municipal pools
- LMCIT paid out over $2m in the City of Maplewood; imposed $200k deductible on further personnel suits

ADDRESSING INCIVILITY: STEPS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Build the city team

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Set an expectation of civility

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Consider a code of ethics/statement of aspirational values

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Adopt effective citizen engagement strategies and build support

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Get better at telling the city story

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Get better at telling the city story

Ensure all officials and staff understand their roles, responsibilities & authorities

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Support, don’t undermine, the role of the mayor

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Support, don’t undermine, the role of the mayor

See the CEO has understanding & training in the role that he/she can play to prevent incivility

Organizational support from LMC and MCMA

- Provide training
- Use existing peer-to-peer networks
- Offer media support
- Offer online resources – www.lmc.org/civility
- Create a financial incentive program – mainly related to Newly Elected Official Training