

Village Manager Association of Oak Park

Village Manager Search

Editorial

March, 2006

Carl Swenson has done an outstanding job for the Village of Oak Park as Village Manager for a decade. We thank him for his outstanding service and wish him well in his new position. He has been one of the longest serving executives since Oak Park voted to institute the council-manager form of government in 1952.

A change in the Village Manager presents many challenges. Residents, the business community, staff, local and regional governmental entities and other stakeholders will look for a blueprint of the future in the credentials of the new manager. The challenge statement and the position description should be available on the Village web site as soon as possible. Communication and transparency foster confidence in the process and the ultimate decision by the board.

The Village Board sets a course for the future beyond its own tenure. The past 10 years have yielded unprecedented increases in our home values, median incomes, tax revenues, and bond ratings. Oak Park has solidified its reputation as a diverse, solid, and reputable community in the Chicagoland area. A new manager must have impeccable administrative qualifications to keep it as such. Our vision for the future, however, requires the Board and citizens to be creative and bold and look beyond those requisite skills in the selection of the next manager. We look for a manager who can achieve the following:

1. Be a strong leader in the community with demonstrated rapport among all constituents.
2. Enhance Village Hall performance in terms of timely responses to citizen requests.
3. Demonstrate empathy and respect in all interactions with citizens and staff.
4. Explore the challenges facing an historical "urban" suburb with full disclosure, and provide practical solutions for long-term viability. There should be no hidden agendas and no manipulation of data and resources simply to appease the Board or the community.

5. Increase the level of inter-governmental cooperation with surrounding communities, examples of which include our consolidated dispatch center and emergency response systems.
6. Increase and expand the existence of intra-governmental cooperation efforts like the Drug and Gang Task Force, the TIF carve out agreement, shared expenses, and long term budget planning to ease the tax burden.
7. Expand our focus on regional planning and transportation systems.
8. Increase with local legislators opportunities for state and federal funding such as for education, local roadway improvements and the "Cap the Ike" project.

To determine a roadmap for the future, we must first look inward to assess our willingness to embrace that future with non-partisanship and open agendas. We therefore ask the current Board to ask itself the following questions during its deliberations:

1. Will the current Village Board commit to the independence of the Village Manager? Can the board clearly articulate goals and allow the Village Manager to implement those goals without daily interference?
2. Will the Village Board recruit a Village Manager with a strong background in responsible economic development? If yes, will the board allow the new manager to use her/his experience to guide the board?
1. 3. Will the board refrain from micro- managing the village staff during the time of an interim manager? Retirements, potential retirements and terminations have already placed a burden on the staff. Will the board be tolerant and supportive publicly and privately during this period?
3. Will the board give the new manager time to put a new team in place? Patience will be required from Board members. Will potential candidates be impressed by current board protocols with staff? Will Village staff have an increased or diminished role in the future?
4. Will the current board have the courage to put the best candidate in the position? Can individual preferences be overcome for the greater good? Each candidate represents a unique opportunity, yet over 50,000 individuals depend on the administrative and managerial skills of the Village Manager.
5. Will the current board be truly non-partisan in its selection process? Will all members of the community be listened to equally? Will opportunities to influence be given to all?

6. Will the board act quickly? Any delay in the process of selection has ripple effects throughout the community.

In choosing a new Village Manager, the current Board is making a choice that will have impacts lasting well beyond its tenure. We feel strongly that this is a time to look beyond how a manager conducts process in Village Hall. Instead it is a time to move to hire the best individual to lead our Village into an exciting future.

Bob Kane, Presiden, Village Manager Association (VMA)