

LEAPP CASE STUDY SERIES

MUNICIPAL PROFILE: TOWN OF COLLINGWOOD

Kim Wingrove, the Chief Administrative Officer from the Town of Collingwood explains that leadership development is becoming a more pressing issue demanding original and innovative solutions. As Kim notes in this LEAPP case study, the public sector needs to reconsider how we develop leaders and manage talent if we are going to have a pool of talented individuals who feel confident about their ability to lead in an increasingly complex environment.

MUNICIPAL PROFILE: THE TOWN OF COLLINGWOOD

With a population of 17,920, the Town of Collingwood is located in Simcoe County, Ontario.

Geographically, it is situated on Nottawasaga Bay at the southern point of Georgian Bay.

Collingwood is administered through a two-tier system of government. The town is one of sixteen lower tier municipalities in Simcoe County.

Historically, the majority of the workforce in Collingwood was employed in the manufacturing and retail sectors. More recently, Collingwood has focused on establishing itself as a four-season tourist area



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LEADER IN FOCUS: KIM WINGROVE

Owing to her vast experience within the Ontario Public Service and her current role as the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) for the Town of Collingwood, Kim Wingrove can attest to the leadership and demographic challenges facing the public sector.



Kim Wingrove, CAO of the Town of Collingwood, spent much of her career in the Ontario Public Service (OPS). While in the OPS, Kim held various positions across different ministries including an Executive Assistant to the Assistant Deputy Minister at Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Director of Rural Programs at the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food Rural Affairs, and most recently the Director of Regional Economic Development at the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. Kim left the OPS for the municipal sector in 2009 when she became the CAO at the Town of Collingwood.

Kim has a Masters Degree in Leadership from the University of Guelph and a Bachelors of Education Degree. She has certificates in HR Management, IT Service Management, Information Systems Audit, and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Along with her formal education, Kim relied on

her experience with the municipal sector during her OPS career to prepare for her current role as CAO. Kim explains that she had several informal mentors from her time with the OPS and from the private sector who have helped to develop her leadership potential. Recognizing the benefits of mentorship, Kim currently mentors her municipal staff members as they progress through their careers.

Kim is eligible to retire within the next ten years and has several goals for the organization to achieve before the end of her tenure as municipal leader.

“I want the organization to espouse the values of trust, collaboration, openness and mutual support. I want to ensure that solid processes and procedures are in place and that staff have the opportunity to work to their fullest potential.”

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When discussing her potential successors, Kim explains that it may be a challenge to find skilled candidates. Not only is the age/long service of the current senior management pool in the municipal sector affecting the supply of potential leaders, Kim notes that many younger staff are not interested in pursuing the CAO role.

Further, attracting young professionals who are interested in leadership roles is a

challenge for a small municipality. Small staff complements mean that senior staff have a heavy workload and opportunities for junior staff to move up incrementally are limited. As Kim notes, the organization has to find a way to develop talent and attract potential leaders with limited resources for recruitment and talent management.

SUCCESSION PLANNING, RECRUITING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

When Kim joined the Town of Collingwood, her first challenge was to learn the intricacies of how the departments function and interact and to understand the organizational norms and values. Implementing improvements to the system of operating policies and procedures for the municipality was a necessary first step in creating a succession plan or talent management strategy.



As a result, initiatives including succession planning and talent management are only at their initial stages.

“There are several challenges to implementing succession planning initiatives, including the lack of sound staff development policies and procedures, which we must first correct. However, we do realize that we do have to get a succession plan in place. Engaging staff across the organization in that effort will be critical to its success.”

While Collingwood does not have a formal succession plan or talent management program in place, Kim explains that the administration is committed to developing the potential of their staff through backfills and cross-department secondments. Kim notes that she encourages employees to participate in interdepartmental projects,

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undertake special assignments, further their education and develop different skills.

Kim explains that the challenges to implementing a talent management program include the flat organizational structure, lack of dedicated funding and competing priorities.

“We are a small municipality and it is difficult to find authentic ways to grow talent. However, this doesn’t mean that talent management isn’t important. Managing the development of my staff is one of the most important things I do.”

FAST FORWARD: THE NEW REQUISITES OF LEADERSHIP

Owing to her experience as a leader in both the provincial and municipal sectors, Kim can attest to the new requisites of leadership. Kim explains that when she became a CAO, critical skills included council staff relationships, strategic thinking, listening, political acuity, and the ability to set and achieve priorities. Being able to lead the organization and form the bridge between the public, staff and council was essential. Despite only being in the CAO office for less than 2 years, Kim can anticipate changes to her role as leader.

“I do anticipate changes in this role. Our taxpayers are increasingly engaging (and being encouraged to participate) in public life. Communications with them and knowledge awareness through marketing will be increasingly important. Technological and social media skills will also be requirements considering the evolving communications environment.”

Kim explains that current and future municipal leaders will have to become more innovative in a number of areas, including service delivery. As public expectations continue to rise and resources are limited, the service delivery field will become more complex. Similarly, Kim explains that economic development will become increasingly important and complex as communities move towards regional partnership models of economic development.

“It is becoming more important for a municipal leader to establish the city’s competitive advantage. We will need to move from the traditional individual view of economic development towards regional collaboration with numerous stakeholders, including different orders of government, not-for-profit and for profit organizations and between municipalities.”

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Considering these new challenges for municipal CAOs, Kim predicts the essential skills of municipal leaders will change. Specifically, communication and negotiation skills will be necessary, along with strong political acuity. The ability to think outside the box and be risk tolerant is essential. Finally, future CAOs will have to have the ability to think with a regional perspective and be innovative.



Sunset Point, Collingwood Ontario

LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE ADVANCEMENT PILOT PROJECT

Kim joined the LEAPP Leaders Roundtable as it presented an opportunity to learn from colleagues experiencing similar leadership development challenges. Kim believes that developing the leadership potential of staff should be a priority for all municipalities and hopes that LEAPP can provide innovative solutions in this regard.

“We need to focus on developing the younger staff since they are the next generation of leaders. We have to provide opportunities for them to develop their skills and gain experience. I hope that we can discover some innovative new ideas which can sharpen my own perspective on leadership development in the municipal sector.”

When discussing the development of strategies to address the leadership gap through LEAPP, Kim explains that she

envisages the province playing a coordinating role.

“Leadership development could be practiced on a broader scale to uncover best practices. These best practices could then be shared with municipalities. I see the province playing a coordinating role in partnership with the municipal sector and stakeholder associations to develop these best practices or strategies and facilitating the sharing of resources.”

Kim states that she looks forward to learning leadership development techniques and best practices, as she plans to implement these strategies in her own organization. As Kim explains, her staff and department heads are looking for innovative solutions to address the leadership gap.

