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Prior Lake, MN 55372

Dec. 7, 2013

# A Message from the Mayor

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## How Does Your City Government Work for You?

Voters elect a mayor and councilors to represent them in city government. By contrast, the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) members participate directly in the General Council and vote every other month on major decisions presented by the elected three-member Business Council. Township government also gives residents the opportunity to vote directly on decisions. Direct government (also referred to as Town Meeting government) works well in communities up to perhaps a couple thousand voting residents. Town Meeting government has a long tradition in smaller communities across New England (typically limited by law to towns with no more than 6,000 residents). Over 23,000 people and 13,000 registered voters live in Prior Lake, and it just wouldn't be effective with 13,000 voters meeting every month or two and trying to vote on 150 or more agenda items. This is perhaps the most important reason that Minnesota state law directs cities to establish representative local government.

What does representative government mean for how your city council works? Perhaps most importantly, your votes entrust the elected officials to represent your interests. The voters delegate to councilors and the mayor the authority to act on their behalf taking into consideration the long-term needs of the city. Each election, your votes to elect, re-elect, or un-elect the councilors and mayor serve as the ultimate vote of confidence or no confidence in our representation of your interests. I can tell you that we all feel this is a very serious and sometimes heavy burden.

Think of the City Council as the Board of Directors of the City, with the City Manager as CEO. Just as in a private sector board, the role of the council best focuses on the direction, policies, budget, capital spending, tax levies, and ordinances of the city – all critically important and also very broad topics. We will serve you best when we focus our attention on these issues, carrying out active debate and deliberation on each of these areas and staying out of the details of day-to-day decisions. The role of the City Manager (CEO) is to work with the Council (Board) to establish strategies, budgets, and policies, and then to execute the activities in support of serving the needs of residents as determined by a majority of the council. The city manager's job definitely includes paying careful attention to all the details.

Members of any city council cannot know all the details of city operations; it's just too big a job for part time elected officials, most of whom have no professional background in municipal government. Most of the decisions councils make affect the city for a very long period – 30, 50, 70 years and more. City staff apply deep engineering and city planning expertise to assemble the information needed to support city infrastructure and council decisions. The council really needs to keep its eye on the long-term best interests of the city. I can personally attest to the challenges faced by effectively considering the long-term impacts of the council's decisions.

For these reasons, your interests are best served by the council hiring a qualified professional dedicated to a career in municipal management – a city manager. The council regularly reviews the performance of the city manager in light of the overall status of the city, and based on the direction set by the council. As you would expect, the council takes appropriate actions based on the reviews.

As you watch city government in action, I encourage you to take the nature of representative government into account. It often moves remarkably slowly, but we take so long under state law, largely to ensure effective representation, due process and a fair hearing for the affected residents we represent.

Please let us know what you think and how you feel about the issues and decisions facing the city. We really pay attention to the voices of residents when we hear them, and this helps us more effectively represent you.

**Sincerely,  
Mayor Ken Hedberg**