

Mike O'Neal

Mike, I do not know why Collegedale fired their manager or the Signal Mountain applicant withdrew at the last minute. I do know that Maryville, Tennessee's city manager has been manager there for 28 years and it is a well-managed city.

A professional manager in a public or private agency is a person who has prepared himself or herself academically and has acquired an acceptable level of experience in planning, organizing, directing, controlling, staffing and administering the activities of the agency in such a manner as to achieve the goals of the agency.

The Maryville board apparently knows the difference between legislative policy making and oversight and administration. They understand that their legislative function and responsibilities are different from the administrative and managerial function of the city manager. They address broad policy issues such as the police department's use of deadly force and high speed pursuit, the debt and investment policy of the city, growth and development policies relating to commercial and economic development, zoning and land use, personnel and purchasing policies and other important policies. They understand that it is their responsibility to provide for effective management and perform an oversight function without getting directly involved in the day-to-day operation of the city.

While there are many qualified elected officials in Tennessee cities, some elected officials do not recognize the need for having a professional manager with municipal experience and they do not seek professionally trained managers. Some think that they were elected to "run the place" and that includes managing it. They like to become involved in daily operations and administration. They often do not recognize their important policy making roles and do not even address policies until an issue becomes a crisis.

In those instances where a professional manager is employed and the board becomes involved in administration, friction often develops between the manager and the board when the policy making board begins to hire and fire, purchase goods and services, give orders to department directors and other employees, fails to support the manager in his efforts to enforce board policy, and directing the administration of other activities, mostly managerial or administrative in nature. Most qualified professional managers will not put up with such interference.

Constituents put a lot of pressure on board members to become involved in everyday operations of the city. They want board members to step into administration of affairs and make things happen, regardless of established policy. Many board members are not good at responding to these types of requests and they jump right into the manager's area of responsibility.

The lack of ineffective legislative policy-making and professional management often goes on unnoticed. Private organizations that are not effectively managed usually go

bankrupt. Public agencies that are not effectively managed usually do not go bankrupt; they just increase the revenues (taxes) and the inefficiencies and ineffectiveness remains hidden.