

*Staying In Your Lane:
Commissioner, ED, and Staff
Roles and Responsibilities*

WPPA Commissioner Seminar
July 26, 2023

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The Central Thesis

- The job of Commissioners is critical and must be done well because the “big issues” are not going away.
- The smooth relationship between the Commissioners and the chief executive officer – here the Executive Director – is critical for success.
- What you do as Commissioners is very important now and into the future.
- Critical components of port success are (i) defining the lanes and (ii) staying in the lane.
- “Those who never change their minds, never change anything.”

Define Terms

- “**Leadership**” - is the art of developing vision, direction and support of an organization and its members.
- “**Management**” - describes the science of systems, processes and controls to achieve an end state.
- “**Culture**” - is the common values, customs and social institutions of an organization.

Governance vs. Management

- Balancing the fundamental role of the Board of Directors (Commission), the Chief Executive Officer (the Executive Director) and Staff is critical.
 - Strategic vs. Tactical
 - “Why-What-How”
 - “30,000 feet vs. in the weeds”
 - “End State” - describes the specific situation at the successful completion of an operation.

Why Look at “Governance”?

- It is both “substance” and “culture”
- It is not intuitive
- Each Commissioner approaches the job from a different perspective
- There are no “commissioner qualifications”
- It makes the Commission and each of you more effective
- It helps avoid mistakes – taxpayers may not bail you out
- It makes everyone’s service much more rewarding
- It will yield future results

Measure of Success for Today's Work

- Step back and take a critical look
- Have an open dialogue
- Review relationships
- Review “Keystone” documents
- Review and where necessary reset

The Individual Commissioner

Authority and Responsibility of Individual Commissioners

- Nada, nyet, nothing
- Only the Commission can grant authority
- Do not task staff – they do not work for you
- Expect the Executive Director takes responsibility for what “staff does or fails to do”
- Refrain from becoming involved in management – even if you are good at it
- Be careful about perception when
 - Speaking to other governments
 - Speaking to tenants
 - Speaking to civic groups
- Once an issue is decided, support the Commissions’ decision – the “body politic”

Exercise No. 1 – Call Central Casting

- a. Please provide five +/- attributes of the perfect Commissioner
- b. Please provide five +/- attributes of the perfect Executive Director
- c. Please provide five +/- attributes of the perfect staff

Commission Leadership Lane

- Governance is a lot harder than management – but it is what the Commissioner is elected to do
- Figure out why you are a Commissioner
- Every human organization has a culture
- Be a leader – not a spectator or a critic
- Always seek consensus
- No decisions are worth “blowing up the Commission”
- You cannot always be right
- Look for opportunities to be persuaded
- Do no harm

Commissioners' Time – A Precious Resource

- Commissioners have very limited time
- they often have jobs and other commitments
- The Open Meetings Act limits *staff* access to the full Commission. The Commissioners' time is a precious resource that should not be squandered
- The Commissioner role should be focused on governance

The Commission
As
The “Body Politic”

The Commission

- Has the statutory authority to operate the port
- Commissioners can achieve amazing results when acting together as a Commission
- Disagreements on substance between Commissioners is healthy, needed and expected
- Decides, as a group, what to expect in voting
 - Consensus vs. Majority
- Set the culture of the Commission and the entire Port
 - Avoid “Reaching” into staff
 - Avoid relitigating / not supporting past decisions

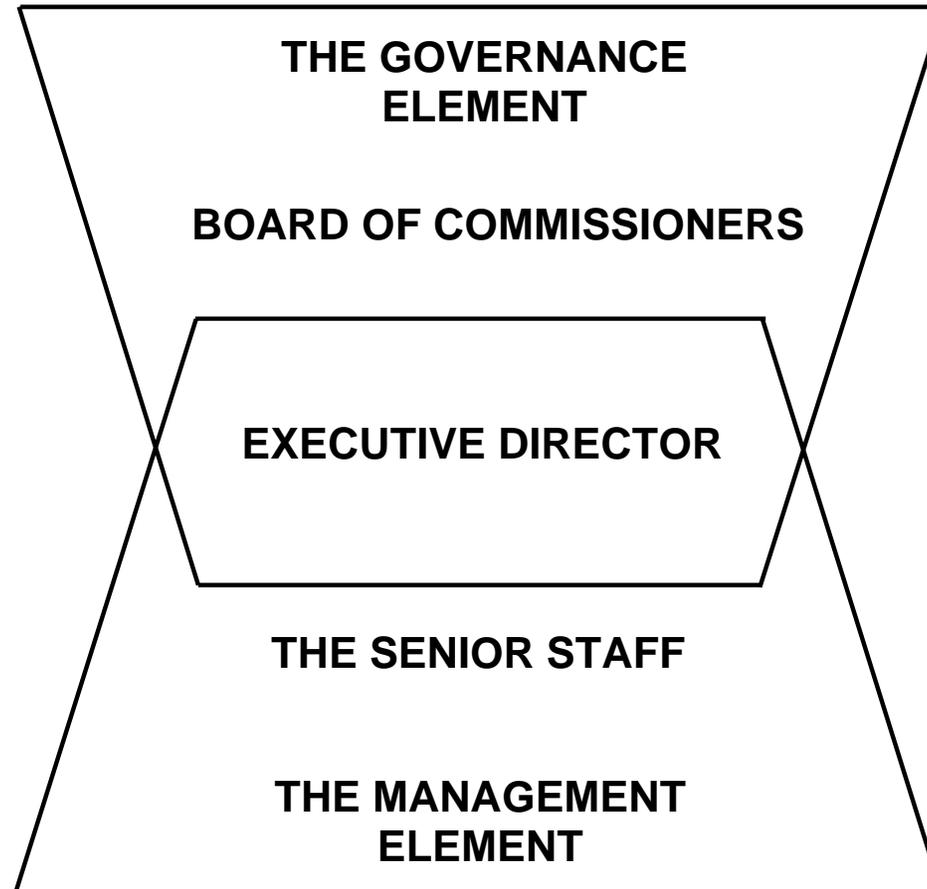
Exercise No. 2 – Why Does Your Port District Exist?

- a. Why does your port district exist?
- b. What (in five words) does your port district do?
- c. How does your port district do what it does?

All The Substance Starts With The Commission



The Governance -Management Interface



Parkinson's
Law
and
The Law of Triviality...
briefly stated

Parkinson's Law: Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion

And the corollary for a Board or Commission...

“The time spent on any item of the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the (dollar) sum involved.”

– *C. Northcote Parkinson*

Elements of the Commission Lane – Vision and Strategy

- The Commission establishes the strategic vision
 - What does the port district and its citizens value most?
 - What is your vision where you want to be next year, in 5 years, 10 years, and 20 years?
 - What is the roadmap for achieving the Commission's vision?
- Keystone documents
 - Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements
 - Capital Budget
 - Strategic Plan
- The Commission and Executive Director establish a "commission workplan"
- Consider an annual review of the Commission's performance

Elements of the Commission Lane – Managing and Leading the Executive Director

- The Commission leads and manages the Executive Director
 - Systems to manage performance
 - Job description
 - Annual review
 - Delegation of Powers Resolution
 - Succession plan
 - Information flow (both ways)
 - Budget based management
 - Policies
 - Leasing
 - Marina Rates
 - Leadership of the Executive Director
 - Imparting the vision
 - Seeking input

Elements of the Commission Lane – Inter-government Relations

- The Commission leads and manages the relationship with the other elected officials and the community
 - Coordinated approach with the Executive Director
 - Familiarity with other electeds
 - Standard presentations prepared by staff

Elements of the Commission Lane – Efficient Commission Meetings

- The Commission must run efficient and productive commission meetings
 - Managing the agenda
 - Managing public input
 - Balancing tasks and strategy
 - Achieving a good and respectful relationship with the other commissioners

Barriers to Effective Commission Meetings

- Lack of clarity about the primary functions
- Ease of agenda
 - Business vs. Work-study
- Lack of a clear understanding of when Commission input is expected and received
- Lack of preparation
 - Commissioner says: “I’ve been busy and really didn’t get a chance to review the packet.”
 - Staff Hears: “I am important, you are not, and who cares anyway. I always make important decisions in the spur of the moment.”

Barriers to Effective Commission Meetings

- Confusion between process and content
 - Commission: We would like to be consulted
 - Executive Director: This is my decision or here is your one choice
- Communication problems (not listening, making faulty assumptions, etc.)
- Attacking people vs. challenging ideas
- Unnecessary “Robert’s Rules” hybrid process

The Commission Manages the Executive Director

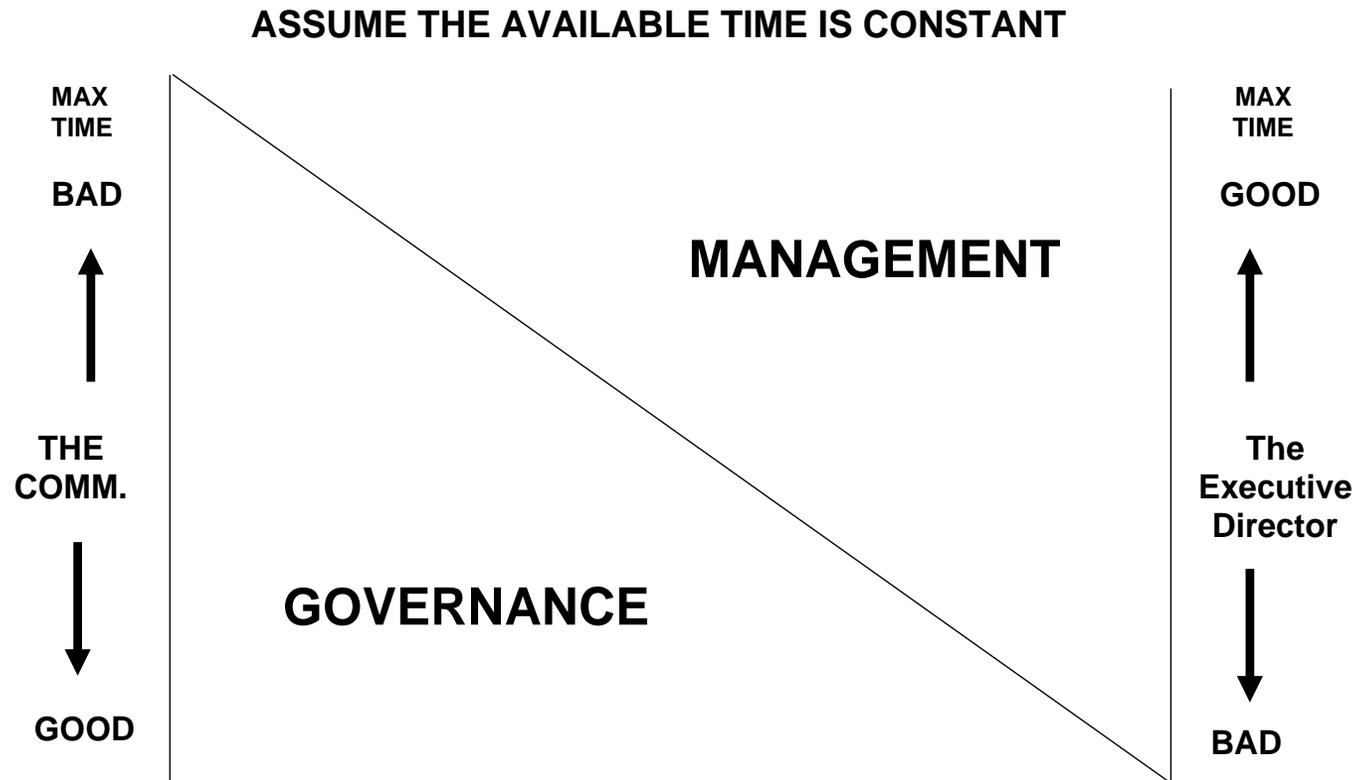
- The Commission:
 - Thinks primarily about the larger, long-term strategic issues
 - Provides the overall direction
 - Wants to make the Port a success
 - Develops KPIs
- The Executive Director:
 - Works for the Commission
 - Thinks primarily about the day-to-day operations
 - Implements the direction of the Commission
 - Wants to make the Port a success
 - Provides all Commissioners with the same information
 - Develops KPIs

The Commissioners and the Commission Support of the Organization

- The Commissioners purposeful sets the Commission culture
- The Commission build the team with the senior staff and employees – they are always listening
- The Commission sets clear pathways for control and information and stages of decision
- Commissioners resist the temptation to become the direct pipeline for tenants, employees or other governments

The Commission and the Executive Director and Staff

The Governance - Management Paradigm



Role of Staff at a Commission Meeting

- It depends – the Executive Director delegates responsibility
 - Who regularly attends meetings?
 - Is a staff member responsible for a specific agenda item?
 - Can staff be called on to speak to other issues?
 - What should be off-limits?
 - The next generation of Port senior leaders
- The Commissioners should get questions in early and demand complete staff work.
- How should staff respond to a “left field” question?
 - “I will get you a complete answer.”
 - “We should schedule this for a work-study session.”

Building an Effective Commission - Staff Relationship

- The Executive Director manages the commissioner-staff relationship
 - Workload
 - Urgency
 - Uniform information to all Commissioners
- The staff wants to provide information to Commissioners
 - But they have full time jobs
- At Commission meetings the staff appreciates
 - No pop quizzes
 - No grandstanding
 - “Job well done” when appropriate

Budget Based Governance

The Importance of Budget Based Governance

- Adopting a budget is the most important thing the Commission can do
- Only opportunity to make decisions in perspective
 - Staff prepares draft
 - Commission sets broad priorities

How to Use a Budget

- Streamline meetings
 - “Is this in the budget?”
 - “Which line item is this coming from?”
 - “Are there any deviations from the budget?”
- Acts within the budget are good management
- Acts outside the budget needs a solid explanation

Exercise No. 3 – Self Evaluation Staying In Your Lane and Keeping the ED and Staff In Theirs

1. Describe the “culture” of your commission in three words?
2. Has the Commission reviewed its “rules governing the transaction of its business”?
3. Does your ED stay in the ED lane?
4. Does Staff stay in the Staff lane?

Exercise No. 4 - Commission / Executive Director/ Staff Interface

- Is the Commission the “right depth” into Executive Director decisions and issues?
- Is the delegation of powers resolution updated annually?
- Is the Executive Director providing the right level of information?
- Is staff advocacy too much or is staff providing just the facts and no recommendations?
- Does the Executive Director give the Commission room to govern?
- Is staff being responsive to Commissioner concerns?
- Is the Commission respectful of staff at meetings?

The Commission's Most Important Work

- **Goal:** Encourage the Commission to do its most important work
- **Inputs:** **Commissioners**
 - What are the long-term 30,000-foot governance issues?
 - Has the Commission identified the “big ideas” or the “big issues”?
 - Has the Commission identified key performance indicators (“KPIs”)?
 - Is there sufficient time to discuss the process, the staff work, and then the Commission direction?
 - Does the Commission loop back and get updates?
 - Is there a twelve-month workplan?
- **The Outreach**
 - Does the Commission have an effective plan to “liaison” with other elected officials?
 - Does the Port provide presentations for Commissioner presentations to civic groups?

THANK YOU !

Questions?

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