

INTRODUCTORY NOTES – LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP FORUM

Ken Cameron FCIP

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Introduction

- A passionate believer in the power of local government all my life.
- While working on the Robarts Royal Commission on Metropolitan Toronto in the mid-1970s I was very influenced by Alexis De Toqueville, an 18th Century French commentator on democracy in America, who said “Municipal institutions constitute the strength of free nations,” an idea that literally turned my understanding of government on its head.
- While many find local council meetings tedious, I find them endlessly fascinating.

We are at a critical moment in human history

- Threats to our continued existence as a species, along with all the other innocent plants and animals whose existence we threaten.
- Not about saving the planet- it will be here long after we are gone if we fail to realize that Mother Nature will have the last laugh. It’s about protecting the ability of the earth to support life, including us.
- Successful responses to all the global threats – climate change, sea level rise, population growth, loss of species diversity, food security, energy – all depend on enlightened action at the local level.
- Fortunately, our local governments in Canada have risen to the challenge and are leading the way in helping Canadian society take a responsible approach to our future. This is a good thing, because if we can’t do it in Canada with all our wealth and knowledge, what hope is there that other local places can take the necessary action?
- I have always been impressed by the British Admiralty’s instructions to its ship commanders during the Napoleonic Wars: “Think in oceans; sink on

sight.” In other words, always work with the big picture, but take bold action if you see an immediate opportunity to advance the cause.

- Navies need ships to do their job and so do we. Our “ships” are leadership, and its trusty frigates, followership, partnership and mentorship.
- The program laid out before you will allow you to explore the meaning of those terms and, equally important, to impart and share with others your experience and understanding, for you were leaders before you were elected or you wouldn’t have been entrusted with power by the voters.

My role

- An interested observer, absorbing all the messages – expressed and implied – by the participants. Think of me as the Forrest Gump of the forum.
- On the last day, I will sum up what I have learned from you and your colleagues in a very brief special treat: a non-PowerPoint presentation.
- In the meantime, as you see me circulating through the meetings and the networking sessions, please take a moment to introduce yourself and share your perspective on the issues we are discussing.
- I look forward to working with you in the next few days.

Ken Cameron
3676 West 23rd Avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
V6S 1K7
H/O (604) 224-6509
M. (604) 290-3158
kdcameron@kdcameron.com