A Message from the Chair

I joined the Municipal Law Section in 1990 at the urging of my employer/judge and soon-to-be Municipal Law Section Chair, John D. Doyle. I voluntarily left the safety of a state court clerkship to open my own law practice—a solo practice. He was sure I would enjoy the camaraderie of fellow attorneys on the “front lines,” but more importantly, the Section members I would meet and network with would become invaluable resources. That became abundantly clear when, shortly after hanging out my shingle, I became counsel to my hometown village zoning and planning boards. I learned much from the Section’s fall and annual programs, solicited models of various ordinances from around the state from fellow members, and was comforted by the sharing of experiences in our quest to provide the best representation possible for our clients.

The practice of law has changed remarkably since then and the Section has changed with it under each chair since I signed on. Each chair inevitably ponders the issue of “How do we remain relevant to our members?” What was relevant in 1990 may not be relevant today.

Our hardworking Executive Committee met May 15–16, 2003, near Albany for a planning workshop and developed policy which impacts our mission, committee structure, programs, membership, this publication, and our budget. Let me highlight a few of the policy changes.

Mission

The Section has a new Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Municipal Law Section shall be to serve, educate and provide a common meeting ground and impartial forum for those attorneys engaged in dealing in any capacity with issues in municipal law.

Our Section members are full-time government lawyers, private practitioners representing local government and developers, law school professors and administrators, judges, lobbyists, and municipal financiers. The former mission statement was too detailed and too lengthy to accommodate the ever-changing needs of today’s municipal lawyer. Technological advances bring new challenges to our practices and our clients. This new Mission Statement gives us the flexibility to deliberate issues not even imagined ten years ago.

Committees

Our committee structure allows members with similar interests to meet and exchange ideas and

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information and inform the general Section membership of issues specific to their practices. The following five committees will remain intact:

- Employment Relations
- Ethics and Professionalism
- Land Use and Environmental Law
- Municipal Finance and Economic Development (f/k/a Real Property Tax and Finance)
- Membership

The Section has always had a Legislation Committee but it has been dormant for the last two years. It will be reconstituted, hoping to forge new ties with NYCOM, NYSAC, and the Association of Towns. Anyone interested in tracking legislation and working with these groups should contact me. Two new opportunities to get involved were created—the Government Operations Committee, designed to handle telecommunications and other technological advances and their impact on local governments, and a committee that will be created to assist with the expansion of the Section’s Web site. Check <www.nysba.org/municipal> for our Section site if you have not done so already. In addition to providing a forum for those with a specific interest in the subject matter, each committee will give members an opportunity to author articles for the Municipal Lawyer, identify topics and speakers for the Fall and Annual Meetings and for CLE programs, identify important legislation and case law developments, and initiate legislation for discussion and adoption by the Section and the NYSBA. Anyone interested in serving can contact me at rminarik@courts.state.ny.us. I welcome questions and suggestions.

**Education**

The Section’s goal with the Fall and Annual Meetings is to provide our members with 6 credits of MCLE at each, including at least 1 credit of Ethics. If you attend both meetings each year, you will fully satisfy your MCLE requirements. Start by attending the upcoming Fall program in Albany October 23–26, 2003. This program will mark the first time we have sponsored a meeting jointly with the ABA’s State and Local Government Law Section. Our experience indicates that members find joint meetings with other groups and NYSBA Sections beneficial. We will endeavor to arrange more joint programming as soon as practicable.

As with any endeavor over the last two years, the Section has experienced the financial impact wrought by the devastation on September 11, 2001. After taking a hard look at how we can cut expenses, preserve important membership services, and implement desired initiatives, we decided that a modest increase in our Section dues from $20 to $30 was in order. Regrettably, we will ask NYSBA to approve the increase, but hope that you will notice the expansion in our membership services long before the dues increase becomes a reality.

Finally, a word of thanks to outgoing Chair Linda Kingsley. Her leadership for the past two years will make my time at the helm easier. The change you see in the Municipal Lawyer was only one of her many initiatives. I hope to meet you in Albany in October.

Renee Forgensi Minarik

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**REQUEST FOR ARTICLES**

If you have written an article, or have an idea for one, please contact Municipal Lawyer Editor

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Articles should be submitted on a 3-1/2" floppy disk, preferably in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect, along with a printed original and biographical information.