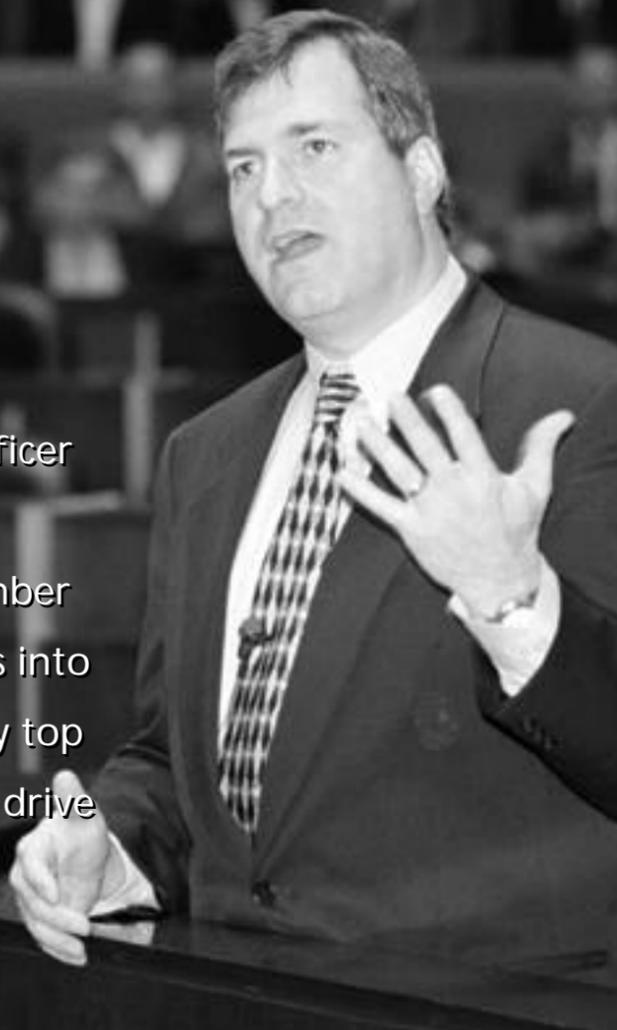


Making Toronto tick

Mike Garrett, P.Eng.

The first chief administrative officer for the megacity, Mike Garrett, P.Eng., came on board in November 1997 to roll seven municipalities into one. This is no small feat for any top bureaucrat, but Garrett has the drive and the credentials for the job.



Q: You worked throughout the 1970s to make Toronto's waterfront a magnet for tourists and recreation, then at the provincial natural resources ministry as assistant deputy minister. Eight years followed as chief executive officer for Peel Region. Was taking on the new megacity's chief administrative officer a daunting task?

A: I knew the job would be filled with both big challenges and big rewards. When you merge anything that once operated independently, there's going to be some transitional bumps. Unifying seven different municipal databases, accounting systems, uses of technology and service approaches would test anyone's strategic abilities. But we're moving forward very quickly, and the end result will be a new and improved City of Toronto.

Q: What's a typical day on the job like?

A: It is not unusual for me to start with a breakfast meeting around 7 a.m. When I get to my office at City Hall, I like some quiet time to review committee agendas, which can sometimes be several inches thick, and answer correspondence and make calls.

On council days (three a month), I'm in chamber for the

full day. During those sessions, I meet with councillors and senior staff. On other days, I meet with commissioners, senior staff and stakeholders, and often have working lunches. When time permits, I like to schedule site visits to any one of our thousand locations across the city to meet and talk with staff at work locations. In the evening, I'm often booked for speaking engagements or meetings.

Q: Is the megacity's transition phase still ongoing? How is it playing out, given the province's downloading of services (like social housing, provincial road maintenance and building water treatment facilities) to municipalities? Will we see some basic services eliminated?

A: We have almost completed amalgamation—that is, the coming together of the seven municipalities. Through amalgamation savings, we were able to offset the provincial download of new responsibilities, TTC capital increases and increases to municipal programs, such as police services.

We are now beginning a multi-year process of working to change the way we do business. This period of organizational transformation will be focused on assessing, harmonizing and improving municipal services. Our role as administrators is to

present issues, options and recommendations. Decisions about the way we deliver those services will be made by council.

Q: What were some of the changes made to the delivery of public services?

A: Public service in the new city had to be more efficient and more customer-driven. We have streamlined our use of personnel, management, office space, and we are looking at other types of space, such as garages and yards, to improve efficiency. With our customer in mind, we have begun looking at ways to make Toronto citizen-friendly—everything from a one-stop caller information service, to making the library's entire collection accessible at every branch. Some of this work is part of the process of harmonizing municipal services.

Q: As Toronto continues to grow, will our existing public works meet the increased demand?

A: We are in a better position than before to manage our public works. In the past, each municipality had to handle its needs independently. Now that we have pooled our resources, we can draw from all of Toronto. For example, we recently completed shutdown and maintenance on two water filtration plants in record time by temporarily having the other two plants handle the load. In the new city, there will be many more opportunities to problem-share and problem-solve together.

Q: How do you feel about increased fare hikes for Toronto Transit users and user fees for recreational facilities?

A: In any urban environment, there is a place for user fees. The art in applying them is striking the right balance. Different areas have varying socioeconomic needs. User fees are one method of paying for services not universally used by all residents. The TTC fare hikes and user fees for some recreation programs were tough decisions for council to make.

Q: In several major cities in the United States, city cores have become poor and rundown, and the suburbs have become the preferred living and working space. Are steps being taken to prevent this from happening in Toronto?

We're moving forward very quickly, and the end result will be a new and improved City of Toronto.



A: Urban decay is not the way Toronto intends to go. Our city core has always been a desirable place to live and work. There's no reason to think that will change. For our part, city government will work to keep Toronto thriving with solid financial planning, administrative excellence and investment in our core urban communities that support homes and employment for our citizens.

Q: Y2K is looming. What are your feelings on Toronto's preparedness?

A: The City of Toronto is confident that our Year 2000 program is on track. Since the formal creation of the new city, Y2K readiness has been a number one priority.

We have compared ourselves to other large U.S. cities, such as New York, Chicago and Detroit, as well as to the province of Ontario. We are on track to being Year 2000 ready by the fall.

Q: Time for a prediction: How will Toronto look in 2010?

A: The short answer is Toronto 2010 will be an improved version of Toronto 1999. We are currently working with council to develop a strategic plan outlining a long-term view for Toronto. Our efforts are focused on three principles—environmental, social and economic stability. The report will be completed by September, and we look forward to sharing it with Torontonians.

Karen Hawthorne



Garrett talks to city workers on-the-job at the transportation service yards.