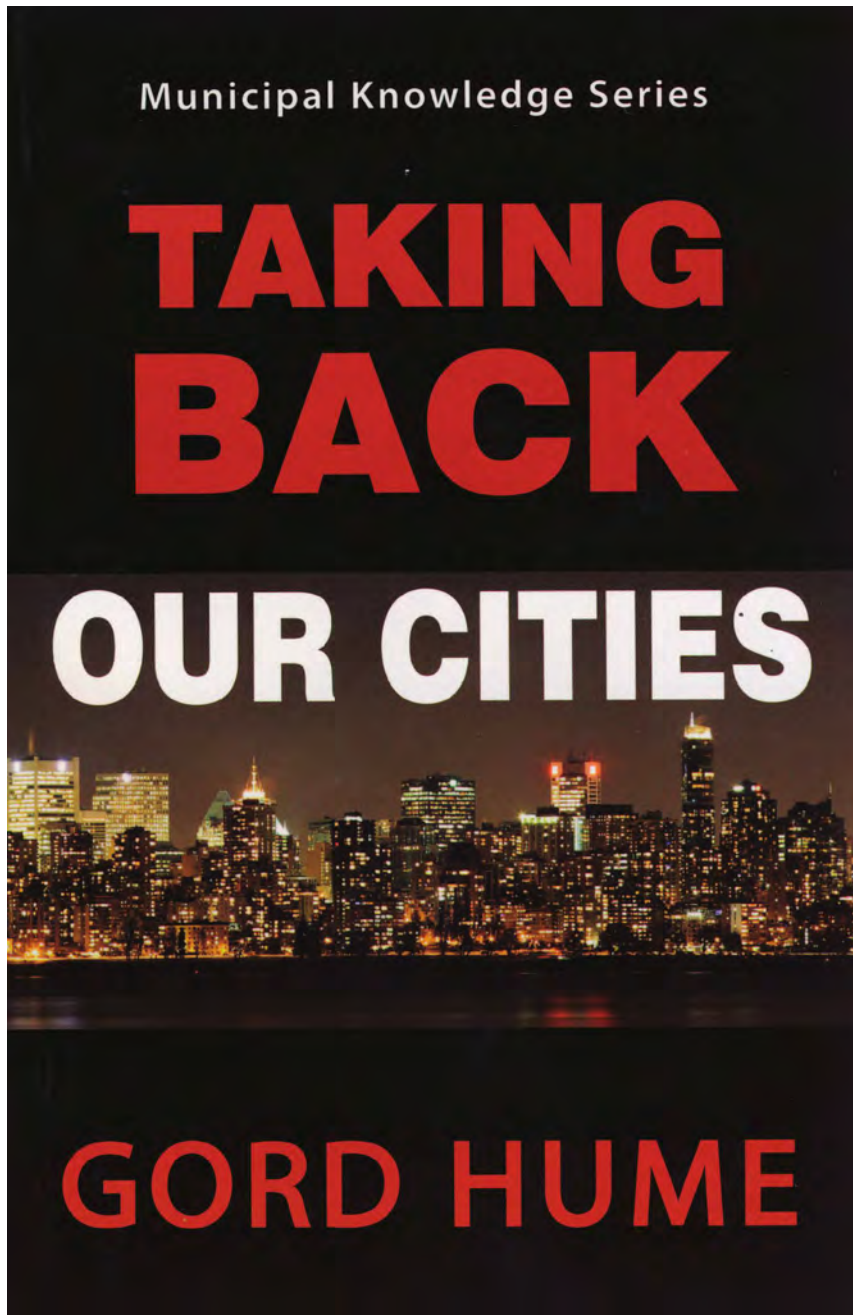


► **TITLE: Taking Back our Cities**
► **AUTHOR: Gord Hume**

Reviewed by Lynne Bereza, Communications Coordinator



The title, not to mention the cover, of Gord Hume's recent book *Taking Back our Cities* would suggest that this is solely an urban-focused offering. Not so – virtually every chapter can be applied to the smallest rural municipality to the largest city.

The author, who is a well-known commentator on municipal government and a four-term council veteran, offers keen observations throughout this very readable and succinct book. He also includes dozens of insightful comments from those who 'get it' – some of Canada's most high profile current and former municipal, provincial, and federal leaders.

Few municipal leaders would argue with the book's opening paragraph: "*For most Canadians most of the time, municipal government has become their most important order of government.*"

What follows is not only an in-depth look at the paternalistic relationship between municipal and provincial governments, but a blunt comparison of former Prime Minister Paul Martin's government to the Harper government of today.

There is a lot of discussion on property tax (which Calgary's mayor, Naheed Nenshi, calls "regressive, feudal and medieval") and plenty of debate on the need for additional taxation powers for municipalities. Hume is a proponent of municipalities receiving one new cent of the GST, reducing local property taxes by 15 to 20%, and introducing municipal income taxes. These are intriguing, innovative ideas that are fully explored throughout the book.

Along with discussing the outside pressures faced by council (as the chapter on media "Snakes, Liars or Defenders of the Public" aptly does) and the inside problems (as does the chapter "Quidnuncs on council"), the book is peppered with stories that will have municipal leaders alternately nodding or shaking their heads. For instance, under the heading "utter disregard for municipalities", the author describes a bearpit session at an Associa-

tion of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference:

The bearpit session attracted, as I recall, 17 provincial cabinet ministers lined up on stage. The discussion was vigorous, with good questions from municipal leaders. A nice reception followed, hosted by the province, allowing further face-time with those ministers who stayed, and giving further hope of developing contacts and relationships that would be valuable to the municipalities.

The next day, Premier McGuinty announced a major cabinet shuffle, including many of the ministers who had been speaking and even making promises to help their municipal colleagues at the conference. Municipalities had been bad. Thanks for coming. Back to square one."

Hume is careful to balance his critique of other orders of government by shining a light directly on municipalities. As he states in the chapter "First, Look in the Mirror":

"No other level of government is going to be prepared to offer any 'new deal' for

municipalities if they are perceived as small-time, ungrateful, inefficient, and incapable of handling larger issues and powers, and just not ready for playing on the larger stage."

After that bit of self-reflection, readers will be ready to tackle some of the final chapters, dealing with how to actually transform the system. In the last chapter, Hume, as he expertly does throughout the book, compels the reader to take an honest look at their own community and their own leadership:


"At the end of the day, citizens are not going to be asking who cared about unimportant by-laws – they are going to be demanding which councillors led and worked on the big issues that are really important to their family and helped to change their city:

- *Can my kid find a good job in our city after graduation?*
- *Is our downtown vibrant and culturally dynamic?*


- *Am I getting great value for my property taxes?*
- *Do other communities respect our city?*
- *Are we attracting and retaining bright young minds?*
- *Do we offer a superior quality of life for all residents?*

These are just a few of the questions Hume forces the reader to ask themselves – about their community, their council, and their own ability to lead. The book is chock-full of gems that will be invaluable to any municipal leader going forward as the work toward sustainable, predictable funding for municipalities continues. And, at only 155 pages, it is a quick, thoughtful, and extremely interesting read.

Hume is the author of two other books – *Cultural Planning for Creative Communities* and *The Local Food Revolution* – and is currently working on his fourth book, *Ten Trends that will Change Municipalities*. His books can be purchased from Municipal World Bookshop at books.municipalworld.com. 



FLOCOR
The Piping Products People




FLOCOR

Flocor carries thousands of combinations and styles of valves, pipe, fittings and hangers along with a premier line of fire protection sprinklers and related equipment as well as water works pipe, fittings and valves.

No one knows the PVF market or products better than Flocor.

FLOCOR
777 CENTURY ST.
WINNIPEG, MB
TEL: 204-774-3461
FAX: 204-786-5044

www.flocor.ca  **FLOCOR**
The Piping Products People




ADVANCED
LAND SOLUTIONS INC.

Please contact us for more details
Paul Hoepfner, President
Kemberlee Hoepfner
Advanced Land Solutions Inc.
204.825.7982
advancedlandsolutions@inetbiz.ca

Advanced Land Solutions offers sales and services pertaining to all Industrial Vegetation Management.

Services include:

- Consulting on integrated IVM program development and improvement
- Licensed chemical applicators
- Conventional spray chemical application
- Specializing with ECOblade ZERO drift chemical application
- Mechanical IVM methods of land improvement
- Roadway and right of way maintenance contracting
- Rental equipment available

Sales of the following:

- Full product line Diamond Mowers products
- New and used IVM mulchers and mowers
- ECOblade chemical application system
- Bodine Buckets, a complete line of excavator/wheel loader buckets and attachments
- Shop supplies and tools

Advanced Land Solutions strives to meet your demands and exceed your expectations. COR certification #R120140510

Click here to return to
Table of Contents