

A Town in Trauma

by

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Until disaster struck, the town of Canfield had enjoyed moderate prosperity and steady growth that made it the envy of other towns in the largely rural northeastern part of the state. This was because fifteen years earlier Canfield was selected as the site for a Superior Tire Company plant, creating about two thousand new jobs in the community.

Other towns of Canfield's size, about 25,000 population, and smaller towns across the state had not been so prosperous. They struggled to maintain adequate municipal services on inadequate revenue and were not able to offer many opportunities for development. These less fortunate towns were faced with such problems as dwindling populations, declining school enrollments, abandoned buildings, and eroding business and industry.

Canfield, on the other hand, made steady but small gains. It supported just under two hundred retail business establishments that created about 2,600 jobs and had combined annual sales of more than \$240 million. Its thirty wholesale business firms employed about 475 persons.

In addition to the Superior Tire Company, Canfield had about twenty other manufacturers of such products as boats, canoes, steel springs, fireplaces, concrete manholes, metal containers, coach homes, and so on. Altogether these plants employed almost a thousand persons.

Canfield was also the site of Bradford College, a junior college that was part of the state's higher-education system, with a staff of about 365 persons. The church-sponsored Northeast Health Center employed a staff of almost 350 persons, and the Municipal Hospital had a staff of nearly 250. The elementary, junior, and senior high schools employed 115 teachers with a student to teacher ratio of 19 to 1, 17 to 1, and 16 to 1, respectively. There was also an excellent vocational technical school serving a tri-county area with a teaching staff of 75.

Canfield had a bonded indebtedness of only \$550,000 and had no immediate need for going further into debt for capital improvements. Its water supply included seven wells, and a water plant constructed ten years ago had a capacity of 3,775,000 gallons per day. The plant could handle a maximum daily consumption as high as 3,250,000 gallons, far above the current need. The city's water storage capacity in ground and elevated tanks was 5,400,000 gallons. Also built about ten years ago was a sewage treatment plant with the capacity to handle the waste of a city with a population of 40,000.

The city's transportation facilities were adequate for freight and travel. Canfield was served by two major state highways and one United States highway, and a north-south interstate interchange was one mile from town. There was one railway with two trains a day. The transit time for rail shipments to distant trade centers was four days for Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle. This was reduced to three days for trucks.

The disaster that struck Canfield did not come without some forewarning. At first there were rumors the Canfield plant of Superior Tire was on a list of several being considered for closure. There was not much the community could do to take preventive action, for word came shortly from headquarters that layoffs would start at

once and the plant would be shut down one month later. Canfield lost the \$40 million annual payroll that was the major contributor to its economy, and two thousand people began looking for work.

With many cities in the state seeking to lure industry, it did not seem likely anyone could be found immediately, or ever, to take over the Superior Tire plant. There were no other jobs available to those who had worked at the plant. Further, the closing of the plant created a decline in business in the area, and unemployment continued to increase as other firms were forced to lay off workers.

Mayor Angela Guidoboni took the first step in determining what action could be taken to counter the devastating effects of the plant's closing. She called a meeting of the city council to confer with the city manager, Superior Tire plant officials, the head of the local of the United Rubber Workers, the president and secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and business, financial, and civic leaders. "We've got to do something," she told the group. "We can't just sit on our hands. Maybe we can't hope to restore things to what they were, but we just can't allow affairs to go their own way."

It was decided at the meeting to establish a committee representative of the principal elements of the community to canvass all possible courses of action and decide on priorities. The committee would determine if state and federal government aid could be obtained, what official actions would be required of Canfield, what assets Canfield had for attracting new business and industry, and what facilities Canfield had —social, educational, and economic — to assist in the reconstruction program. City Manager Leonard Rascoe was directed to nominate persons for a Canfield Restoration Committee, and to outline and help implement a program that would not only tackle the city's immediate problems but plan for its future.

Questions and Instructions

1. What immediate help can Canfield expect from state and federal governments?
2. What can Canfield do itself to lessen the traumatic effect of the plant's closing?
3. As City Manager Rascoe, how would you select the members of your committee in regard to the following considerations: role as a representative of a constituency; conflict of interest; membership in various sectors of the community-business, manufacturing, labor, profession, education, and so on; minority groups; and civic, charitable, and cultural organizations?
4. What matters should Rascoe take into consideration in determining the optimum size of the committee?
5. To whom should the committee be accountable?
6. How should the expenses of the committee be borne?
7. What professional help should the committee employ?

Case 23: A Town in Trauma

Name:

Case Log and Administrative Journal Entry

This case analysis and learning assessment is printed on perforated pages and may be removed from the book for evaluation purposes.

Case Analysis:

Major case concepts and theories identified:

What is the relevance of the concepts, theories, ideas and techniques presented in the case to that of public management?

Facts — what do we know *for sure* about the case? Please list.

Who is involved in the case (people, departments, agencies, units, etc.)? Were the problems of an “intra/interagency” nature? Be specific.

Are there any rules, laws, regulations or standard operating procedures identified in the case study that might limit decision-making? If so, what are they?

Are there any clues presented in the case as to the major actor’s interests, needs, motivations and personalities? If so, please list them.

Learning Assessment:

What do the administrative theories presented in this case mean to you as an administrator?

How can this learning be put to use outside the classroom? Are there any problems you envision during the implementation phase?

Several possible courses of action were identified during the class discussion. Which action was considered to be most practical by the group? Which was deemed most feasible? Based on your personal experience, did the group reach a conclusion that was desirable, feasible, and practical? Please explain why or why not.

Did the group reach a decision that would solve the problem on a short-term or long-term basis? Please explain.

What could you have done to receive more learning value from this case?