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Bob Scott
Never Stagnant, Always Exploring
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Southern City

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If you attended the League’s annual conference last year, I would guess you noticed just how informative the programming was and how the programming format provided a great opportunity to be exposed to the most information possible. If you didn’t attend, you should have.

There is good news if you didn’t, or if you did.

This year’s conference, Connect CityVision 2017, to be held in Greenville on Sept. 20-23, will follow along a similar format, with six high-level, brief “Town Talks” before the full conference audience, followed by breakout sessions where you can chose between two of the folks whom you’ve just heard from for a deeper dive into the subject matter.

We heard from lots of attendees last year who enjoyed that format, as well as the terrific group of speakers and the expertise they provided on topics aligned with the League’s strategic vision of where cities and towns should be by 2030.

As you might guess, this year’s theme focused on the word “Connect” again aligns with those principles that grew out of the Vision 2030 process. In this case, three focused on the following:

• Urban and rural municipalities routinely work together for economic success.
• Municipalities widely practice productive partnerships with counties, other governments, and the private sector.
• Technology is widely used for service delivery, citizen engagement, and economic development.

With that in mind, expect to see another great group of speakers who have expertise in smart cities technology, in the formation of regional partnerships, and in creating economic successes regardless of cities size or geographic location.

Of course, the conference is not just about the learning opportunities that can help bring new solutions to your town or city. It is also about the networking opportunities and the ability to share and exchange ideas with fellow municipal officials from around the state, with numerous receptions that lend themselves to those exchanges.

And, there’s plenty of fun too. This year we are looking forward to having nationally known comedian Sinbad provide the entertainment following the NCLM Dinner & Gala. And the Host City event will take place at East Carolina University, an event that the City of Greenville is calling “A Night of Swashbuckling Surprises.”

There will be one big change this year, as the conference runs from a Wednesday to Saturday morning, from its previous routine of Sunday to Tuesday. It’s a change that will hopefully allow for more attendance and better conform to municipal meeting schedules.

At last year’s annual conference, as I was sworn into office, I spoke a lot about commitment. For municipal officials dedicated to making their cities or towns better and utilizing the League to its full effect as an advocacy and service organization, that commitment – if at all possible – should involve participating in our annual conference. It’s where we come together as a group to take stock of where we are, where we have been, and how we can be even better going forward.

So, join me at CityVision 2017, and let’s keep the momentum going so that we can keep making our cities and towns better places for our residents. SC
Collaborative Workspace to Spur Entrepreneurship in Apex

A few years ago, research by Apex Economic Development discovered strong potential for Apex to recruit and grow segments of the information technology sector through entrepreneurship. Town staff and leadership began investigating even further possibilities to include a wide variety of start-up businesses.

Consider this about Apex:

- A young, talented, educated workforce – Check.
- A cool, quaint and vibrant downtown – Check.
- New amenities such as breweries and specialty eateries – Check.
- Walkable communities and first class parks – Check.
- Established business parks with nearly full occupancy – Check.

What’s missing in Apex for entrepreneurs? The right facility to house individuals and businesses in growth or start-up mode. The answer? Create a collaborative/co-working space that would fill that void and complement the successful models that currently exist in the Triangle.

Fast forward to today and Apex is officially dipping its toe in to the co-working world. After months of continued research, which included interviews with managers and operators of co-working spaces in the Triangle, interviews with tenants or “members” of these facilities, exploring the inventory of potential space for co-working in Apex, and networking to find just the right partner to manage and operate the effort, co-working space in Apex is becoming a reality.

The proposed facility, to be called Coworking Station Apex, will occupy approximately 2,500 feet on the second floor of a building in the heart of downtown Apex on North Salem Street. The building owners, who operate two businesses out of the first floor space, are teaming up with Coworking Station LLC to create the right environment for co-working. In turn, the Town has entered into an agreement with Coworking Station LLC to provide assistance for initial renovations and infrastructure needs. The planned space will have seven office suites, six small offices, a conference room, restrooms, a kitchen and open “café” space.

If the name Coworking Station LLC sounds familiar, it should. They also manage and operate Coworking Station Holly Springs, which has been successfully in business since April 2016. Managers of both facilities plan to offer members a dual membership for access to either facility.

While no formal opening date has been set, it is hoped that Coworking

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It took a few moves, but Bob Scott eventually found the North Carolina mountain river gem of Franklin. And it’s fair to say, at this point, that it’s grown on him.

“I’m kind of thinking about staying now,” he told a Southern City writer with a laugh during a lunch-hour walk downtown, where every storefront wore “open” signs for a supportive amount of foot traffic.

Scott’s words were, of course, in jest. He’s lived in Franklin since 1967, has been its mayor for the past three years following 11 as a town alderman, and expresses a love for his locality that’s hard to miss in any length of conversation.

“I don’t know that I’d want to live anywhere else, to tell the truth,” he said. That is saying a lot. Mayor Scott sort of has a hankering for new experiences and change. His professional history alone offers enough proof.

It might also speak to the funny, indirect way he became an elected official. (We’ll get to that.)
"When I was in college, all I wanted to do was to be a Life Magazine photographer and a writer," he said. That interest fed his experiences in his earlier teens, when he worked on the high school newspaper. He carried that interest into college, landing a job at the Greenville, S.C., News-Piedmont, as he continued school at nearby Furman University.

"I was working a full-time job as a photographer at the Greenville News," he explained. "And eventually, as my job went up, my grades went down, and it finally got so bad that I decided I'd better do something or I'm going to get drafted here."

Whether prime for the draft or not, the young Scott, amid the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, decided to join up with the S.C. National Guard.

"I figured if we were all going to be nuked, I was going to go with friends," he said with a laugh.

But it also gave him a new landscape to express his photography. That was his job with the Guard, whose Officer Candidate Program graduated him in 1965 and sent him toward work as both a photo officer and public information officer for the Guard and later the U.S. Army Reserve. Scott was on scene to document subjects like aviation activities and concept development, which was one of his personal interests.

"I had the best job anybody could have ever asked for in the military," Scott said. "It was just marvelous."

After his service, he sought a return to news with his mind on the North Carolina mountains, eventually bringing him to Franklin in 1967 and into a public relations role at the power company, following a tip about the opening from the local paper's editor. It was a good job, but wasn't quite the fit for a seeker like Scott. So, he was back in print before long, covering several western counties for the Asheville Citizen (now the Citizen-Times) and -- so appropriately -- given free rein to cover any curiosity.

"Anything I wanted," he said. "I covered snake-handlers, the Rainbow Family (and its 12,000-hippie-strong July 4th outdoor gathering), all of these weird things that happened out west."

That's just what called to him. Scott admits with a laugh that he simply wasn't interested in covering government boards.

But, being Scott, he still wanted the new-and-different, and his urge to do something more directly positive for the public -- perhaps nurtured by his time in the military -- was taking over.

The options would have been numerous but, of all things, it was law enforcement in his sights. And he went full-on, from patrolling the trails of the Nantahala as a sworn officer -- "Gun totin' and everything," the former journalist said -- to helping with the development and funding of a new jail, to attending the FBI National Academy and earning a degree in criminal justice from Western Carolina University, ultimately to serving as executive officer of the university's campus police department, where he retired from the profession about 10 years ago.

But it makes sense that his path started with the profession that was founded upon the drive to seek out truth and document experience -- local newspaper reporter and photographer extraordinaire.
“I’ve had a checkered past, career-wise,” he joked before quoting his agreement with Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

But his transition to elected office, though treated with every bit of sincerity, wasn’t quite as intentional. It was actually via another huge force in his life: his wife, Nancy. While Scott was collecting careers, Nancy was teaching high school civics and, beloved by the community, was eventually appointed to the Franklin Board of Aldermen. She served more than a decade, after which residents pushed her to run for mayor. Scott was among them, urging her to file, but she was ready to make way for new blood.

Scott didn’t think he’d be it.

“I figured out that if I told her that I would go run, then that would make her go down and sign up and run again,” Scott explained. “But she didn’t. At the last minute, I’d signed up to run for the town board – and I served 11 years.”

He joked that he got elected by people mistaking him on the ballot for his wife. “So I’ve just tried to follow in her footsteps,” he said.

But that doesn’t mean his desire for change and rejuvenation isn’t fed.

Franklin, today a town nearing 4,000 in population, is no longer the gem-mining capital it once was (though rubies are found in business logos all over town). And, like municipalities across North Carolina, it has a lot of opportunity to grow and reinvent.

Not that times aren’t already great there. Main Street downtown is at full occupancy, and an active year-round calendar sees local festivals draw thousands apiece.

But Mayor Scott and fellow leaders see more ahead – with the use of existing resources.

He recalled past conditions of the Reedy River in Greenville, S.C., and how its cleanup created a new tourism and beautification draw, with greenways and other scenic lures.

“In Franklin, we’ve got the Little Tennessee River coming right through town,” the mayor said. “Why are we not capitalizing on that?”

The town plans to. It’s already observing the popularity of an area...
brewery that’s positioned itself riverside, and of a boat access that Duke Energy recently installed downriver. Town officials have seen an uptick in kayaks and canoes floating past, and are currently looking at zoning solutions to grow “river district” business.

The mountain town subsequently has a great opportunity – with work in progress – to seize upon the booming outdoor recreation economy. (As recently reported in the Citizen-Times, the Outdoor Industry Association’s Outdoor Economy Report shows that industry nationally generates $887 billion annually in consumer spending, supports directly 7.6 million jobs and creates $125 billion in federal, state and local tax revenue. Figures specific to North Carolina hadn’t been released by the time of this writing but were expected to be sizeable.)

There are a couple outdoor outfitters already operating in Franklin, one of which is a Main Street occupant, not far at all from yet another popular brewery, which actually occupies the former town hall building.

That sense of change and possibility makes Mayor Scott love the dynamics and elasticity of town government.

“Those are things that, 10 years ago, who would have ever thought there would be a brewery in the old town hall, which sat empty for years after we moved?” Mayor Scott said.

“But here’s the thing I want to do as a mayor,” he continued. “I don’t care how crazy you think an idea is – put it out there. Run it up the flagpole and see if anybody salutes it. Because there’s only so much conventional stuff that you can bring into a town and not get stagnated. The lifeblood of a town is newness. It is being open and willing to trying something new. And you’re going to fail some. That’s part of it. But if you don’t try, the town will stagnate…. You just have to be willing to get out there … and see what the town can do.”

The Taste of Scotland Festival parades through town and draws thousands of participants. Photo credit: Bob Scott
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How soon are you picturing autonomous vehicles in your town?

Seriously -- give it a guess. Maybe in 20 years? Thirty? Fifty? (Never?)

Sure, the rollouts would vary from place to place.

But with the competition so fast and furious -- amid all major auto manufacturers and household tech names along with numerous startups and ridesharing companies all driven to be out front with broad sales of autonomous vehicles, or AVs -- the experts’ best guess is that they are just a few years away.

And that’s catching the public sector off-guard.

But to think on it further -- driverless cars, humming past our homes and offices -- it just seems so longshot futuristic, and surely it’ll need time to develop, one might think. So here’s the question: Do we really need to take this seriously yet?

“Absolutely, we need to take this seriously,” said Nicole DuPuis, principal associate for urban innovation at the National League of Cities, in a recent interview. DuPuis is an author of the NLC report, “Autonomous Vehicles: A Policy
Preparation Guide,” created to give public officials some framework when contemplating the technology and its implications for local government.

And to clear all uncertainty on the urgency, she added: “If local government officials started thinking about this yesterday, it might feel like a crunch to figure out how this is going to impact the community, to initiate public engagement and education, to get feedback from the public, and then subsequently to craft a regulation that makes sense for everyone.”

The NLC report begins with essential context, describing the speed of innovation and what’s happened in the past couple years alone. In the wake of several impending or already-inked mega-company partnerships (i.e. General Motors and Lyft) to advance AV possibilities, the U.S. Department of Transportation released its Federal Automated Vehicles Policy, which NLC points out received more than 1,100 public comments. “As the DOT policy and comments clearly illustrate, one of the major challenges facing cities is how to promote a regulatory foundation that ensures safety while promoting the continued innovation of autonomous vehicles through increased testing. The fast pace of technological advancements tests the traditional foundations around government policymaking and procurement.”

The report then lays out a number of subsequent municipal policy questions, like, “What opportunities do cities have to mold state AV policy?”

According to NLC, “Any regulations should be focused around safety, which is the stated primary focus of the Federal AV Policy. Cities have an opportunity to come together and lobby their state governments to advance their concerns around the safe operation of AVs in their communities, including insurance

“ If local government officials started thinking about this yesterday, it might feel like a crunch to figure out how this is going to impact the community, to initiate public engagement and education, to get feedback from the public, and then subsequently to craft a regulation that makes sense for everyone. ”

Nicole DuPuis
Principal Associate
for Urban Innovation,
National League of Cities
requirements and local approval of any proposed AV testing in a city. Obtaining local approval also assists with promoting public outreach and education of AVs that may be operating on local roads.”

(At the time of this writing, the N.C. General Assembly had just sent Gov. Roy Cooper a bill to sign that would lay out the state's first slate of regulations on autonomous vehicles. House Bill 469 makes various amendments to existing motor vehicle law, for instance, confirming that the operator of a fully engaged driverless car wouldn't need a driver's license.)

The NLC report also makes recommendations, such as: “Track and monitor federal and state developments and make your voices heard.” It emphasizes that while state and federal bodies will continue to shape transportation regulations, cities will see the most AV action, which can mean big benefits in efficiency and convenience, but only if the policies are developed with city issues addressed.

For those wondering, “This is definitely not limited to large communities,” DuPuis said, highlighting conversations as to how AV technology may apply to transit, like with buses, or methods of freight, like long-haul trucking -- which drive through towns of all sizes.

Meanwhile, numerous publications have cited AV possibilities with public works and waste pickup vehicles.

And because transportation isn't contained by town borders, experts say regional approaches will be as important as ever. But how it actually unfolds will be up to the people who influence or write the regulations, which is why researchers say it's important for cities to reserve their seats at the discussion table now.

“If we don't do those things, we risk this unfolding in a very inefficient way or, even worse, in a way that doesn't work and is not good for cities,” DuPuis said. But getting it right creates a different future.

“With the many benefits that AV technology promises, including reduction in traffic deaths, increased mobility for the disabled and seniors, reduced congestion, and enhanced connectivity for all demographics, cities have a unique opportunity to be proactive to not only engage in smart planning for AVs, but to also shape the policy around AVs to ensure such benefits are fully realized,” says the report, which you can read in full at www.nlc.org/avpolicy.

Hear more discussion in Episode 24 of the League’s podcast, Municipal Equation.  SC
One of the tough situations that the League’s Public & Governmental Affairs team sometimes must address involves trying to fashion legislative solutions to issues in which we recognize the outcome will never be completely satisfactory to all of member municipalities.

This year’s legislative response to last summer’s state Supreme Court decision in Quality Built Homes v. Town of Carthage and how it imperiled development impact fees is a good example.

By and large, our staff considers the resulting legislation, HB 436 Local Government/Regulatory Fees, passed in the late hours of this legislative session, a huge victory. We recognize, though, that it will not solve all problems for all League members when it comes to the assessment of the fees.

Before I go any further, a little background for those not immersed in the court case and resulting issue: The ruling barred the fees – also referred to as infrastructure capacity fees – charged by Carthage and called into question similar fees charged by other towns and cities. Since then, law firms have been lining up to file similar suits against other cities and towns, potentially subjecting some to liabilities of hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars, although that is far from certain given differences in how cities apply the fees.

One of the reasons for that kind of potential liability is because the state Supreme Court, in the Carthage case, allowed for the recovery of any illegally charged fees going back as far as 10 years, though it may reassess that part of its decision.

The importance of these fees, which go toward paying for large-scale water and sewer capacity like trunk lines and treatment plants and their expansions, is obvious. They allow cities and towns to plan for growth. Without them, that growth is imperiled, as locally elected officials could be hesitant to put that cost onto existing utility rate and property tax payers.

The legislation which was approved makes clear that the fees for water and sewer capacity are allowed, but creates a more uniform structure under which they can be charged. The law also creates a three-year statute of limitations for which claims can be brought, establishing some certainty and limiting the liability of the towns and cities facing any of these types of claims.

As I began this column, I noted that not all of our members may be completely happy with the outcome. It doesn’t wipe out all past potential liabilities, and it will require some municipalities to change their processes and how they charge these fees.

But as they say in politics, it is about the art of the possible, not what one person or group concludes is fair or reasonable.

In this case, League Associate Executive Director of Government and Public Affairs Rose Williams and Legislative Counsel Erin Wynia worked tirelessly, for weeks, along with the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, on the strategy and legislative language that got the bill done. They did so against a backdrop of legislators deciding to eliminate a statutory authorization for Orange County to charge development impact fees for school construction. And they did so while having to negotiate with the powerful N.C. Homebuilders Association.

League communications staff put together careful language to present to legislators making the case that elimination of the fees threatened the very growth that everyone involved wished to protect.

Weighing the outcome against other potential alternatives – including that the fees disappear – shows what a big win this was for League members.
TODAY’S INFRASTRUCTURE:
Symposium Highlights New Directions

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

Our sense of infrastructure is being nudged forward. Green. Smart. Resilient. Even aesthetically pleasing, with stormwater infrastructure said to be so picturesque that it can double as a graduation photo backdrop.

A chance to see it all in action, with discussions of what’s next, drew municipal officials from across the state to downtown Raleigh on May 18 for an Infrastructure Symposium put on by the League with sponsors Smith Moore Leatherwood and Withers Ravenel.

With a bus tour, lunch keynote and incisive panel discussions, focus was heavy on smart-city practices, green approaches to municipal services, today’s transportation solutions and those beautiful stormwater controls.

“Honestly, I think there’s a market here,” said N.C. State University professor Dr. Bill Hunt, a lauded stormwater engineering scholar, pointing to a project in Boone in which stormwater ponds were turned into a spectacular hydroponic system for the growth of sellable plants. “We don’t think about that when we design standard infrastructure,” he said.

Hunt said there’s a key in modeling manmade stormwater systems after nature’s.

“You can take a human built system … model it after a naturally occurring system that we know works really well, and we get about 90 percent the same result,” he said, while displaying data on manmade wetlands. “Now, I don’t know about you, but I find that awesome.”

Subsequent effects, Hunt added, can be urban renewal, improved property values, better recreation opportunities and the spurring of private investment.

“Stormwater practices can look good,” he said.

A smart cities panel followed, led by Mayor Nancy Vaughan of Greensboro. Her city was selected this year by the White House-supported Envision America to participate in a national initiative meant to better position cities to use technology that can improve things like energy usage and data-gathering.

Mayor William Massengill of Benson joined the panel and discussed how his town of just 3,500 residents was one
The first in the state to implement a smart grid system for electric and water meters. It enables town staff to identify irregularities and outage locations in real time, making for quick responses and cost savings.

Mayor Massengill told the audience that he was at town hall when Hurricane Matthew churned through, and as a call came in from a panicked mother whose basement was flooding up to the electric box.

"Without having to call out a single truck, our town manager was able to go onto a computer and disconnect electricity to that family’s home immediately," Mayor Massengill said, crediting the smart grid. "All was good. She was happy.”

He added that crews otherwise restored the town’s power "at an astonishing rate... Some people in Benson never lost power; some for only two hours.”

These smart systems are also helping towns log data -- lots of it. Determining what to do with that data can become a challenge, said Fayetteville Public Works Commission (PWC) CEO David Trego, another panelist.

"What we’ve learned, from some of the early implementers of what they call smart meters, is you can get overwhelmed with the data,” Trego said. "And if you don’t know what you’re going to do with it, it can become a real problem.”

So PWC has turned that data over to the public, via an online portal, so they can see for themselves what the trends are and how they can better use resources like water and electricity to save money.

“It’s really helped our customer service,” said Trego.

Participants also boarded Raleigh
city buses for a narrated tour of special projects with stops for up-close viewing. That included Raleigh’s Union Station, a massive multimodal facility under construction in the Warehouse District to accommodate an array of transportation resources including commuter rail.

Roberta Fox, assistant manager at the City of Raleigh Urban Design Center, said it’s all coming together following a series of federal grants, including TIGER grants, partnerships with the state, and help from the local transit authority. “That is one of the only ways that we would be able to complete something like this,” Fox said.

Additional tour highlights gave participants a close look at Raleigh City Farm – growing crops in the urban area – and the spread of solar panels atop the Raleigh Convention Center.

The event coincided with Infrastructure Week, a national focus on the state of the nation’s infrastructure, the value of federal investments and the creative solutions evolving in cities. SC
The city is a good place to bee.

Ask Leigh-Kathryn Bonner, who spends every day with honeybee hives she’s helped establish in downtown cores.

The Growing Connection Between Bees and Cities

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

“Studies show pollinators thrive in urban areas, so it’s a great way for us to help rebuild honeybee populations, not just through adding beehives, but through education within the community and at the businesses,” Bonner said during a recent visit by Southern City to Durham, where she’s based.

Bonner, a fourth-generation beekeeper, is the CEO of Bee Downtown, a business -- or “beesness,” as she calls it -- based in downtown Durham that works with companies in the Triangle and beyond to host or sponsor beehives in a collaborative effort to expand honeybee populations. According to
a third of honeybee colonies died over the prior year. Some calculations were even larger. Research, from sources including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, shows not one but several potential contributors to CCD, including viruses, genetic issues, invasive mites, nutritional deficiencies and use of pesticides (though not all pesticides across the board).

What much of the general public may not know is that local government has a great role to play in bee rehabilitation, and that North Carolina cities are taking the lead. “It’s deceptively simple,” said Phyllis Stiles, who founded Bee City USA, a national group based in Asheville that works with local governments to develop bee-helping policies or practices. To become a true Bee City, the city council or governing body passes a resolution committing to various measures. (Full info at beecityusa.org.) Perhaps the biggest is the creation of a standing committee that would advise the city as decisions are made in activities that could impact local pollinator health, like landscaping or pesticide use.

“And the implications for that are huge, because pollinators can really thrive in urban environments given the chance,” Stiles said, adding that a survey of one of the densest urban areas in the country, New York City, turned up 200-plus species of bees there (meaning more than just the honey-making kind).

She points out that it’s not just honeybees that are in need. All kinds of pollinators out there – butterflies, beetles and more -- could benefit. Every January, Bee Cities must submit to Stiles’ group an annual report showing what they did over the previous year, which Stiles said is great public information to post and share. Certified Bee Cities are all over the country now, coast to coast, and North Carolina is home to many. They include the very first: Asheville. The latest at the time of this writing was Raleigh (Bee City #49), whose local government posted extensive info about the designation on its website, raleighnc.gov. Back in March, Davidson joined the list (Bee City #37) and also took steps to make sure the media and public understood the significance.

“The Davidson Board of Commissioners and I understand the
importance of sustaining pollinators, and want to make Davidson more pollinator-friendly,” saidMayor John Woods in a public statement. “As one of ourcore values states, ‘Citizens must live in a healthy environment, so town government will protect watersheds, trees, air quality, and other elements of the town’s ecology’ – we are proud of this designation.”

It’s also been a great way to get kids involved with government.

Last year in Thousand Oaks, Calif., a first-grader named Aidan wrote a letter (with a little parental help) to the mayor to tell him of Bee City USA and why Thousand Oaks ought to join.

“Why would Thousand Oaks want to become a Bee City USA? Well,

“ A lot of the studies show that when honeybees are in urban areas, they have more diverse food sources. They have better balanced diets ... they’re in stable living environments ... (they’re) more likely to survive the winter in urban areas...”

Bee Downtown CEO Leigh-Kathryn Bonner

Leigh-Kathryn Bonner, a fourth-generation beekeeper, is CEO of Bee Downtown in Durham. Photo credit: Tyler Maloney
did you know that wild bees, along with honey bees, are responsible for pollinating lots of the food we eat?” posed the student, Aidan Anil Del Bosque. He provided specific examples of things the town could do to help, like reserving open spaces for pollinators and placing bee-friendly plants “in civic areas and (encouraging) citizens to do so in their home gardens.”

Aidan requested a reply, and added a P.S.: “This is the longest letter I have ever written! My mama helped me.”

Thousand Oaks is now distinguished as Bee City #39.

Bonner said she, too, sees local governments making the effort. Durham, she said, changed its local ordinance disallowing beehives after hearing from beekeepers on the need for pollinators.

“It’s a change in mindset,” she said, adding that people who do get into beekeeping have to be serious about it. By her count, North Carolina has the biggest beekeeper association in the country, and some the strictest testing guidelines for beekeepers. So those who tend to hives in developed or populous areas, she insisted, employ every measure to minimize risk and educate neighbors on the positives, which in turn often generates new interest.

“It’s a way for the community to come together for the common good,” said Bonner. “It’s really fun to see.”

You can hear more from Bonner, Stiles and others in Episode 26 of Municipal Equation, the League’s biweekly podcast, found at nclm.org or at soundcloud.com/municipalequation. SC
Helpful Provisions on Public Records and Budget Transparency

By Kim Hibbard, NCLM General Counsel

This year’s legislative session yielded some good news for municipal staff charged with responding to public records requests and maintaining financial information online. The General Assembly gave cities and towns a bit more flexibility that should allow for greater certainty and ease of compliance, and help to conserve staff resources while doing so.

The first of these helpful provisions appears in the state budget bill. You may recall that in 2015 the legislature required the establishment of a state budgetary transparency website. Local governments were to provide information to the Local Government Commission to be published in standardized format on the state website, and the state Chief Information Officer was to coordinate with local governments to facilitate posting of their local budgetary and spending data on their individual websites. The act required that information on receipts and expenditures to and from all sources be updated on a monthly basis.

Soon after the provision was enacted, it became clear to the state agencies charged with implementing it that there were a number of practical difficulties with including all municipalities in the project. Some towns did not have robust websites or the resources to maintain and frequently update them, and state agencies ultimately had to punt on developing comprehensive guidance. Recognizing these difficulties, Section 37.2 of the budget bill, SB 257 Appropriations Act of 2017 (SL 2017-57), removed the requirement as to municipalities. Effective July 1, cities are now encouraged, but no longer required, to participate in the state budgetary transparency project. Municipalities may certainly wish to continue providing financial information online, particularly in light of the other new provision discussed below, but they will now be free to determine the best way in which to do so.

The second change is to the public records act. A provision in SB 131 Regulatory Reform Act of 2016-2017 (SL 2017-10) addresses the obligation of public agencies to provide copies of public records and makes clear that the obligation can be fulfilled by making the records available online. Section 2.9 of the act amends G.S. 132-6 (regarding access to and copies of public records). The new language states that a public agency or records custodian may satisfy the access requirements by making public records available online “in a format that allows a person to view the public record and print or save the public record to obtain a copy.” If the records are maintained online in such a format, the public agency or custodian is not required to provide copies in any other way. The bill makes a similar change to G.S. 132-6.1 (regarding records in computer databases). It provides that making public records in a database individually available online in a format allowing a person to view and print or save the record satisfies the access requirement, as long as the agency also allows inspection of such records that it also maintains in a non-digital medium. These changes were effective on July 1.

Most municipalities already make minutes, agendas, ordinances, reports, and other documents available on their websites. The General Assembly, aware that governmental units are increasingly subject to large and time-consuming records requests, has granted some ability to more efficiently respond to requests by referring citizens to records housed online. Eliminating the need to expend staff resources providing copies should help to streamline the process, although where to strike the balance between individualized customer service and

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At CityVision 2016, a new format that had presenters speaking to the full conference audience in individual “Town Talks” or in question-and-answer sessions before going into longer breakout sessions definitely connected with conference-goers. Whether it was Dan Burden, a planning expert from Blue Zones discussing ways that municipalities make their communities healthier and more livable, or Eckel & Vaughan partner Harris Vaughan talking about the League’s Here We Grow promotional campaign, the League’s staff heard far and wide how much those attending enjoyed the programing and format.

With that kind of format connecting, the label for this year’s conference makes plenty of sense: Connect CityVision 2017. This year’s conference will be about connecting League members to one another, to other strategic partners, and to technology that can help each build connections to and among their residents. It also makes sense that we will largely keep that same programming format for 2017.

These themes fit well with – and were driven by – the League’s Vision 2030 strategic visioning process. Specifically, the conference has been planned around three keys ideas, or operating principles, that came out of that process: that technology is widely used for service delivery, citizen engagement, and economic development; that municipalities widely practice productive partnerships with counties, other governments, and the private sector; and that urban and rural municipalities routinely work together for economic success.

So, at CityVision 2017, which will be held in Greenville on Sept. 20-23, you can look for programming focused on four key themes: Smart Cities/Technology/Citizen Engagement; Regionalism: Connecting Across the Lines; Paths for Economic Success: Solutions for all of North Carolina; and Leadership, Inspiring to Build.

This year’s conference will involve some changes, with the programming slightly more spread out over four days for those attending a full range of events, and beginning mid-week, on a Wednesday, and concluding on Saturday morning.
The events will begin with the 17th annual NCLM golf tournament to be held Wednesday at Bradford Creek Golf Course. That afternoon will see various League affiliate group meetings, and NCLM Board of Directors meeting, a reception and welcoming “Happy Hour” as the conference exhibit hall is opened that afternoon.

The second day of conference will include some of the aforementioned programming, opening ceremonies and the City of Greenville’s Host City Event, which promises to make Pirates of all attending, so don’t miss your chance at the treasure!

On Friday, the programming – featuring both North Carolina-based and nationally known speakers – will continue, and the annual Business Meeting will be held to choose new officers and directors. The evening will conclude with the NCLM Dinner & Gala, with remarks from outgoing President Bob Matheny and NCLM’s new, incoming president. And, in another change, the evening’s entertainment will be provided by well-known comedian Sinbad.

Conference events will conclude on Saturday with a networking breakfast.

Throughout the event, a number of receptions will be held, providing great opportunities for networking for everyone attending. And once again, so much of the conference will be about preparing League members for a future that may be uncertain, but also has the chance to bring fresh, exciting ideas and solutions home to local residents. So, come to Greenville, and connect!

**SC**

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*This page: Lively entertainment, fascinating Town Talks and breakout-sessions about today’s municipal issues made last year’s conference a huge success and will again drive Connect CityVision 2017.*

*Previous page: Conference entertainment, like last year’s performance of Pump Boys and Dinettes, rounds out the experience. Photo credit: City of Raleigh*
For many municipal employees who get their health insurance through an employer group plan, the open enrollment season has likely begun or is on the horizon. But long before employees make their selections, their HR department colleagues were busy working with an insurance company or broker to outline exactly what would be covered, and what’s the best way to balance costs with plan options like wellness programming.

For more than 400 cities and towns across North Carolina, these important conversations occurred over the last six months with a handful of League staffers who service the League’s member-owned, self-funded health insurance pool, the Health Benefits Trust (HBT). Julie Hall, the League’s Director of Health Programs, along with Lisa Ervin, who serves as the Wellness and Health Benefits Coordinator, as well as the League’s member services field consultants, live out of suitcases this time of year, zigzagging the state assisting member cities and towns with their health insurance questions and quotes. And they know their stuff.

“Julie Hall is just an expert,” said Deborah Jolly, who as the Human Resources Director for the City of Shelby arranges coverage for 327 full-time permanent employees. Jolly has worked with the Health Benefits
Trust staff since Shelby transitioned from Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina in 2013. “They are very resourceful, and we always appreciate the customer service. It’s been huge,” Jolly said of both the HBT staff and the dedicated representatives from MedCost, the League’s contracted, third-party administrator and network provider.

Like many pool members, Shelby works through a broker to place its coverage with HBT. League staff routinely sits down with members and their brokers to explain coverage options. Likewise, when members have questions, they are welcome to contact HBT and MedCost staff directly as often as necessary. As Jolly puts it, “There’s always someone to call; it feels like I’ve got an entire team working with me.”

The Health Benefits Trust is comprised of local government entities of all sizes in North Carolina, and it’s been around since 1983. “We’ve seen it all and have been able to adapt to the marketplace over the years,” said Hall. Likely the biggest adaptations have been in the last few years when the HBT began working with MedCost and overhauling its coverage options in response to member feedback and changing market drivers. “We went from having a limited number of plans that really tied our hands in what we could offer members to having more than 20 standard benefit designs and pharmacy benefits,” explained Hall.

Coverage and plans are scalable to the size of the employee group – whether a member has 3 or 1,000-plus employees. The HBT has the flexibility to adapt and adjust for each members’
needs and offer employers the ability to provide multi-
level coverage options to employees for even more
choice and autonomy.
Like with the League’s other insurance pools –
Property and Liability and Workers’ Compensation –
the Health Benefits Trust takes a preventative approach
to risk management and controlling claims through
wellness. Pool members and their employees have
access to wellness programming for weight loss and
smoking cessation through HBT’s partnerships with
Naturally Slim and TrestleTree, respectively.
Member employers can also apply for up to $10,000
annually in wellness grants for employee education,
wellness classes and equipment, and more. Covered
employees are incentivized through lower premiums to
receive their annual health screenings and exams.
Dornessa Froneberger, Human Resources Director
for the Town of Pineville, has also seen HBT’s focus on
customer service and wellness even after only being
with the town for six months. “The League is the type of
comp any that steps up. You gain knowledge upfront –
when we ask a question, we have an instant response to
take back to employees,” she said. “Private insurers can
be so big. You’re transferred to five or six people and still
don’t get your questions answered. It’s a totally different
experience from the corporate world.”
Pineville is new to HBT, having just renewed for its
second year, but already the Town is impressed with the
convenience and level of benefits. Froneberger is also
looking forward to taking advantage of the wellness
program and grant eligibility.
Ken Canning, the League’s Associate Executive
Director of Risk Management Services, has more
than 30 years of experience in both the private and
public insurance sectors. “We are really here to help
our members control their claims and have healthier
employees. We know our members by name when they
call with questions or concerns about how to keep costs
in check,” Canning explains.
You don’t often find that level of commitment and
direct line to proactive customer service and wellness
in the private market, he adds. “We want to change the
game.”

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The NCLM Self-Insurance Trusts, the Trusts you collectively own, had a very successful renewal season. NCLM administers three insurance trusts that are governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of your peers, local elected and appointed officials. Health Insurance and related coverages are provided by the Municipal Insurance Trust of North Carolina (MITNC); Workers Compensation coverage is provided by the North Carolina Interlocal Risk Management Agency (NCIRMA); and Property and Liability coverages are provided by the Interlocal Risk Financing Fund of North Carolina (IRFFNC). They are also affectionately known as: the Health Benefits Trust; the Workers’ Compensation Trust and the Property-Liability Trust.

As of July 1, 2017, the Health Benefits Trust added approximately 600 additional covered lives from 18 new members ranging in size from a small 11 employee group to a 320 employee large city. NCLM Health Benefits Trust is a viable, competitive solution for North Carolina public entities of all sizes.

The Workers’ Compensation Trust added two new members and lost three, and now has a total of 456 local government members. Did you know that if a member covers their Property and Liability exposures, in addition to their workers’ compensation with the League, that they will receive a 3 percent package credit on their workers compensation policy?

The Property-Liability Trust added six new members and lost only one, for a total of 388 member municipalities.

These member-owned, NCLM administered self-insurance pools have been providing coverage and risk control services to North Carolina local governments for over 30 years. The League has in-house claims, risk control, member relations, and underwriting staff ready to assist the membership with any insurance-related issues or training needs they may have. We are just a phone call or short drive away.

In addition to competitive pricing and coverage, the Board of Trustees has further increased the value proposition offered by the pools by providing additional coverage and services including:

1) Cyber Security Protection. The Property-Liability Trust will provide each member with $100,000 coverage for no additional cost; higher limits are available for a charge.

2) Property Appraisal Initiative. Over the next five years we will inspect all Property-Liability member properties with values of $250,000 or higher and all water/wastewater property regardless of the value.

3) Expansion of Law Enforcement Agency Assessments: The Board of Trustees have made more resources available to be able to conduct more of these extremely popular assessments in the coming year.

4) Critical Incident Support for Police Chiefs: The Board of Trustees have committed resources for the League to be able to be a guiding hand for Police Chiefs who become faced with dealing with a critical incident in their communities.

5) Live Driving Simulation Pads: The Board of Trustees authorized the purchase of driving training discs that will provide a resource to train an entire department at one time. These discs are placed under the wheels of a regular vehicle to allow for a real driving experience in the actual vehicles they drive every day.

6) Safety Equipment Grants. The Board of Trustees approved a new program to fund a 50%/50% matching grant up to $5,000 per grant for safety related equipment. This could be

continued on page 46
Describing Deanna Ballard as a first-term state senator doesn’t quite cut it.

And not because the Blowing Rock Republican had a seven-month head start as an appointee to the chamber’s western District 45 seat before her first election in the fall of 2016.

If we’re talking public service, Senator Ballard is a long-timer whose roots grew strong early. They sent her all the way to the George W. Bush White House working directly with the president and first lady, and traveling the world with armfuls of knotted logistics to straighten out ahead of high-caliber meetings between international officials. She’s accomplished a lot. There’s also her time with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Department of Education, among other federal experiences.

Still, the 38-year-old doesn’t take state-elected office lightly, viewing it as both an opportunity to grow and to
meet the expectations of her district, which includes Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell and Watauga counties.

How are you finding the North Carolina Senate?

I survived the short session (after being appointed in April 2016), and this has been my first official long session. It’s been exciting. I think each session has its own dynamic, as far as pace is concerned, but also in personality. You have a few members who have come in. You have folks who have left. It’s been a great learning experience as a whole, and just understanding even more about the bill process and how to get things moving through, get things done, and also the importance of building consensus around something important.

You talk about it as a new experience, but you have a busy political background. Do your colleagues know how extensive it is?

It’s interesting you say that, because it’s not something I’ve really talked a lot about here. I think it’s advantageous to have the federal experience that I’ve had. Bringing that to the table definitely has been helpful, in knowing how the federal dollars flow down to the state. But then, at this point, I’ve had limited knowledge about the state government. So it’s been great to kind of dive in a little bit more and understand the mechanisms that are in place to facilitate those federal dollars, and then the accountability that’s there, or lack of accountability in some areas, too. Being able to identify that and know what to look for. In my previous job, it was all about asking the critical questions or the right questions. So having that background, I kind of knew going into it (that I had to ask): “What do I need to know? What am I missing here?” Just digging in, whether it’s language in a bill, whether it’s in a funding code. It’s investigative work, sometimes, because you’re making decisions on things and you want them to be the right decisions.

How did all of that begin for you? What was your entry to public service?

My college roommate, her dad was running for Congress our freshman year in college – (former U.S. Sen.) Jim DeMint. We’d go stand on the corner, we were holding signs, we were making phone calls. It was just kind of fun. You’re young, you’re 18 or 19 years old. I think I got bit by the bug a little bit. I didn’t even think about it in the long term. I just knew that I was enjoying it…. So I was involved off and on over the years. But in 2002, President (George W.) Bush came to Charlotte for an event – and I would say this was the catalyst for me. I volunteered at an event he was speaking at, and I volunteered with the president’s advance team. I went in for a meeting the night before with the volunteers, and I was responsible for handling a lot of the press advance and moving the White House press corps … and I enjoyed it. I was able to be there on the day of the visit and execute the steps that were needed to make a successful visit. Well, following the visit, one of the team members had asked me, “Hey, you did a great job, would you be interested in doing more?” So it literally turned into one thing after another. Two weeks later, I got a call from Vice President (Dick) Cheney’s office asking if I could go to Tulsa, Oklahoma, for a fundraising event…. I was able to make it happen. One thing after another. It turned into a fulltime job at the administration, where I started working with Secretary Rod Paige at the Department of Education.
I was on the president’s campaign in ‘04, and then at Homeland Security with Secretary Michael Chertoff, and of course, in the White House with the president, and Mrs. Bush as well, for the last three-and-a-half years. Beginning in ’02 or ’03, I actually would travel with the president and first lady doing advance work.

So that meant direct interaction with the president and first lady? Sometimes on the ground, yes. Beginning in ’03, one of my first international trips was to Istanbul for a NATO summit. There are times you’re there, and when the president shows up, you’re the site lead. So you’d better know exactly what’s going on, which principals are already in the room, who he’s getting ready to see, what’s going to happen. Sometimes it would be last-minute briefings with him or her.

Obviously those roles gave you an appreciation for what public office is like. Whether it’s domestic or even international, when you land in a country or state and you’re preparing for a visit, you’re meeting with your host, you’re meeting with foreign officials, you’re meeting with an ambassador, you’re literally negotiating programmatic pieces. And so that means asking questions, that means knowing what you’re putting the principal in front of. … There’s a lot of things like this, this investigative detective type work, which is also helpful when you’re navigating the different agencies and different systems. You have to know the channels to go down and make sure this is accurate and documented. You have to be proactive and not be afraid to ask the hard questions. Sometimes you’re sitting there across from a foreign official and you’re navigating the different things that are going to be talked about at a briefing. You have to have a productive discussion to understand the reasonable outcomes that can come out of it. Strategic planning. Strategic communications. It’s everybody working together.

When you were appointed, were the people in your district’s party aware of your experience and feeling like it would suit well in the General Assembly? (Editor’s note: Senator Ballard was appointed to fill an unexpired term when Sen. Dan Soucek resigned.)

I think a lot of people really liked that aspect of it. President Bush is a well-liked president in my district. Maybe not all areas, I will admit. But he was...
highly principled and full of conviction. The president and Mrs. Bush required a certain kind of presence and certain kind of composure as well. So I think folks were feeling confident in the experience that I had.... More of the concern was about my age than experience.... I'm 38, in the first 15 years of my career, essentially. But I've had this rich experience of teachers and managers. At the age of 30, I was able to travel to over 60 countries. The travel is an education in and of itself, to be in different countries and meet so many different people and see how different countries work and how they drive their economies and how they help their schools. And a lot of people, I think, were excited just by the fact that I'm young, energetic and proactive and willing to step up.

**Do you have good communication with local officials in your district?**

I do. Actually, I just got a phone call this morning from a mayor (in the district). They call me, I pick up the phone. I try to make myself as accessible as I can and be as responsive as I can. I do think for the district, because we are so far west, that it is important for that relationship to be engaged and responsive and for folks to feel that you’re present. So, even though I’m here during the week, that responsiveness is able to help assure them that I know what’s going on there, I know what you guys are dealing with, here's what I'm trying to do here for you. And even when I go home, continuing to be present. Earlier today I was down in Granite Falls. So my days can sometimes be composed of a lot of mileage. But it's important for them to see that you're there and you're involved and you care and you're showing up when you say you're going to show up and engaging in dialogue.... When push comes to shove, I do find that our officials across the district do work together. They email, they call, they call my cell phone. I am quite open to any form of communication. I'm texting more and more (laughter)....

**What's the bottom-line takeaway from your experience?**

It's funny. Growing up, I was never the one who was running for student council or running for office. I was always behind the scenes. And so I think being the principal now ... it's been a real, true growth opportunity and something that I just want to jump in and try to tackle.... I would say that it's been a hard transition to a degree. But it's been wonderful. I'm still in my 30s. I want to grow. I want to grow professionally, I want to grow personally.... When I'm talking to kids and to students, I'm always encouraging them to just believe in the possibilities that are out there. Hard work does pay off, people do recognize it ... I've tried to tell a lot of students this, that people do notice and people do pay attention. It does get recognized. So just be diligent with what's before you, because you just never know who's watching and who will take notice. Somebody will. It may not be on your timeline. But it will happen.  

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City leaders, by their nature, are always charting the future.

But in what tech insiders are calling an age of exponential innovation, clever solutions to civic issues are rolling out at such a rapid (and sometimes incomprehensible) rate that even the recent past retains a futuristic sheen.

Vehicles that communicate with traffic signals and other sensor-clad infrastructure to work in concert? Old stuff by now – but ever ready for innovative, life-improving applications, and getting more accessible all the time.

There’s a lot to explore in the smart-cities conversation. With eyes on the future, an energetic house of mostly
Triangle-area municipal officials, policy experts and industry representatives gathered at the N.C. State University Centennial Campus on June 6 for the Triangle Smart Cities Summit. Keynoted by former Maryland governor and smart-cities advocate Martin O’Malley, the event cast a digital image of more efficient government services, communications and responses that would drive down costs and enhance quality of life.

“The Internet of Things just reminds us of something else we already knew at a primal level, and that is the connectedness of things,” O’Malley said, referring to the ability of cloud-connected devices to communicate and collaborate with one another, like with sensors that can collect and transfer real-time data to city hall from various locations. Durham City Manager Thomas Bonfield, on a panel with fellow Triangle municipal officials, noted the boost that smart data collection, analysis and solutions-modeling could give to regionalism. Bonfield cited existing collaborations between his city and county government on open data, with an online platform that gives datasets to the community to help them and their government spot trends, predict the future and implement smart solutions.

“We have an incredible amount of data on our open platforms,” added Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane, another panelist. She said the city is building new online dashboards to allow the public to observe what the city is doing programmatically, and measure what is being accomplished.

Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger discussed her city’s collaboration with UNC Chapel Hill on tech improvements and implementation, and on how the strategic deployment of sensors are gathering real-time data and creating new levels of predictability and service.

Like many cities and towns these days, Chapel Hill also has a mobile platform allowing anyone to photograph and report a public-works problem -- like a pothole or a graffiti-covered stop-sign -- via smartphone so the city can quickly respond. Residents who report these problems also receive updates on the progress.

Mayor Hemminger said other smart monitoring tools were useful during the NCAA National Championship in April, which saw enormous crowds partying on Chapel Hill streets. Real-time monitoring and analysis of the activity enabled the city to position public safety personnel in an informed way and quickly respond to any incidents.
“We had a fabulous celebration that was very safe,” she said, adding that residents enjoy access to that data as well, because it makes them feel more connected to their city and its behavior in the moment.

A large crowd at the summit listened to and asked questions of the panel, primarily in the interest of adding such smart solutions to their own towns.

A big takeaway was the importance for cities to connect, not only with each other, but also with their local universities or community colleges to collaborate on smart tech ideas and experiments.

Following the summit, N.C. State News reported that NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson and Mayor McFarlane pledged to join the MetroLab Network, a national collective of city-university partnerships focused on improving city government with better data practices. O’Malley is a MetroLab official. Anyone unfamiliar with the smart-cities conversation can get a quick primer from Episode 18 of the League’s Municipal Equation podcast.

Smart cities will also be a focus of Connect CityVision 2017, the League’s annual conference scheduled for Sept. 20-23 in Greenville.
Member Relations Corner

My First Column

By Jennifer Cohen

This is my first column for Southern City. Apparently, part of my new role as Director of Business and Membership Development is to write a column for the magazine. My family is skeptical. They don’t even read the sticky notes I leave on the refrigerator. I, on the other hand, am delighted -- and not just because I think I can legitimately add a new skill to my LinkedIn profile. I’m delighted because it gives me the chance to highlight the terrific things that are happening at the League and, most importantly, in our cities and towns. It is a place to say “thank you,” “congratulations,” and “hey, check out this cool new thing!”

So here goes:

First, thank you Elizabeth City, Emerald Isle, Sugar Mountain, Piedmont COG, Triangle J COG, Spring Lake, Montreat, Blowing Rock, Mount Holly, Warsaw, Fairmont, Stallings, Kenansville, Braswell Memorial Library, Rose Hill, Dare County Tourism Board, Topsail Beach, Franklinton, Housing Authority of Lumberton and High Point ABC, all of whom are new to our health insurance pool. We are so pleased to have you and are excited to be helping your employees stay healthy!

This has been a terrific enrollment season for the League. We have been able to showcase our flexibility in plan designs, ability to underwrite with brokers and agents, as well as our always competitive pricing. We hope all of you give us the chance to help you provide comprehensive, cost-effective coverage that reflects 21st Century health needs.

Second, congratulations to the cities that have completed the League’s Law Enforcement Risk Review: Davidson, Havelock, Surf City, Morganton, Waynesville, Weaverville, and Elizabeth City. These cities submitted to a rigorous review of their agency’s adherence to best practices related to law enforcement. There is no additional fee for this review and it is available to all members of our Property & Liability pool. We offer it because we know how important it is for you to mitigate liabilities, keep your officers safe, and make sure you are current with industry standards regarding training and operating procedures. If you would like further information on this program, please contact Tom Anderson at tanderson@nclm.org or 919-715-2573.

Lastly is the “cool new thing.” We are creating a new safety grant program that will soon be available to all members of our Property and Liability and Workers’ Compensation pools. The purpose of the grant program is to help our members create a safer work environment, one that goes above and beyond OSHA requirements. These matching grants will allow members to purchase items such as ergonomic equipment or other safety devices to help eliminate back injuries. Stay tuned! More information is coming shortly.

Please email me your “thank you,” “congratulations,” and “cool thing” stories at jcohen@nclm.org. Together we will celebrate North Carolina’s great hometowns.

And in case you wondering … this column is definitely getting posted on the refrigerator.

Please email me your “thank you,” “congratulations,” and “cool thing” stories at jcohen@nclm.org. Together we will celebrate North Carolina’s great hometowns.

And in case you wondering … this column is definitely getting posted on the refrigerator.
NLC STATE OF CITIES: Economic Development a Top Priority

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs

It should be no surprise that economic development has been and remains a top priority for cities and towns, nationally and in North Carolina. Certainly, the North Carolina League of Municipalities’ promotional campaign Here We Grow is about making that priority – and all that cities and towns are doing to bring economic growth to their communities -- known among the larger public and state policymakers, and other state municipal leagues are undertaking similar efforts.

So, when the National League of Cities State of the Cities report for 2017 again finds that municipalities across the country cities are emphasizing economic development, it makes perfect sense. That report, issued in May, is based on an NLC analysis of state-of-the-city speeches by 120 mayors across the country.

One of the more interesting findings is that infrastructure appeared much more often in the comments of mayors from municipalities with 50,000 or fewer residents than it did among those from larger cities, perhaps reflecting the difficulty that communities that size have in funding infrastructure.

Besides economic growth, other top priorities for U.S. cities and towns are public safety, infrastructure and housing. The analysis also showed that three subtopics within those areas -- job creation, police and fire protection and road paving – are consistently listed by the nation’s mayors no matter the size of their city or town.

One of the more interesting findings is that infrastructure appeared much more often in the comments of mayors from municipalities with 50,000 or fewer residents than it did among those from larger cities, perhaps reflecting the difficulty that communities that size have in funding infrastructure. The report, though, also notes that with improving finances in many cities, as the larger national economy has strengthened, infrastructure financing has become more affordable for many. It points out that in many of those
Cities, like Raleigh, continue to list economic development as a top priority. Photo credit: iStock

cities, transportation infrastructure that encourages walking and biking continues to be publicly popular.

The focus on infrastructure comes as NCLM has also made it a focus with the Infrastructure Forum it hosted in May (see “Today’s Infrastructure”, page 15).

The report quotes Wheeling, West Virginia, Mayor Glenn Elliott, who ties the emphasis on infrastructure investment and economic development together in much the same ways as the Here We Grow campaign has done. “Like it or not, how our downtown looks and feels is a direct reflection on our city at large,” Elliott said.

In the area of public safety, the report states that police officer training and officer recruitment were on the minds of many mayors this past year, as numerous incidents across the country led to increased tensions between law enforcement and the communities they serve. “The nation saw much division over the past year, and police and race relations were often the center of attention,” said Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane, who was quoted in the report. The use of body use cameras, emergency dispatch system effectiveness and the effects of the nation’s opioid epidemic were all on the mind of the nation’s majors. Again, they were also on the minds of League members and staff, as the League hosted a forum late last year delving into officer training and recruitment as it related to police-community relations, with the hope of helping shape legislative proposals.

The report concludes that cities are “where we come together to live, work and play” and that they “fill the potholes, provide needed services to people and grow the economy.” That conclusion also notes that though cities face fractures at times, they are also the places where mayors and local leaders recognize that the work that they do affects people every day and that they see the challenges and opportunities as disruption on the political and technology front takes hold.

Besides Mayor McFarlane’s speech, those that were analyzed in compiling the report included that of Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo. You can read the full report at http://www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/NLC%20State%20of%20the%20Cities%202017.pdf.
Raleigh Fire Station 1 in downtown Raleigh served as the scene of a lunch to recognize the firefighters and other first responders who responded to the devastating fire that damaged League offices back in March. The League, N.C. Association of County Commissioners and Local Government Federal Credit Union sponsored the lunch, in which 22 local agencies were recognized.

The fire, which occurred March 16, began in an adjacent apartment building that was under construction. Although the Coates Building, jointly owned by NCLM and NCACC, the Reynolds Building and other surrounding properties were damaged, the fire was largely contained even as the wooden apartment structure rolled into a huge fireball. More importantly, no loss of life or significant injuries occurred as a result of the blaze.

At the lunch, NCLM President Bob Matheny made clear the League’s appreciation as he read a resolution approved by the League’s Board of Directors.

The resolution reads as follows:

**Recognizing Local Departments and Agencies Responding to the Fire of March 16, 2017**

**WHEREAS**, on the night of March 16, 2017 a fire broke out in The Metropolitan, a five-story apartment building under construction, located immediately adjacent to the campus of the Albert Coates Local Government Center (“Coates Building”); and

**WHEREAS**, firefighters and other first responders rushed to the scene which would become a five-alarm fire and

one that is reported to have been the largest fire in the City of Raleigh since the 1920s; and

**WHEREAS**, the fire quickly consumed The Metropolitan apartments and the massive blaze began to spread to numerous other structures in the area, including the Coates Center, the David E. Reynolds Building, the S. Leigh Wilson Building and the Quorum Center, these being all the buildings that the League of Municipalities owns or in which it holds an interest; and

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**NCLM, NCACC and LGFCU Recognize Firefighters**

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs

Firefighters enjoy luncheon in their honor. Photo credit: Chris Baucom, NC Association of County Commissioners
WHEREAS, the firefighters were able to bring the fire under control in approximately three hours and continued with great effort through the night to prevent the destruction of the neighboring structures; and

WHEREAS, through the tireless efforts of these firefighters and first responders, the League’s buildings were saved from destruction, and most of the League records and items of business personal property were salvaged and spared from ruin; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire of the Board of Directors of the North Carolina League of Municipalities, on behalf of its member cities, towns and villages, to express its sincere appreciation for the diligent and heroic efforts of all the members of those local departments and agencies as set forth below that dutifully assisted with the skillful response to this fire.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Directors of the North Carolina League of Municipalities that:

Section 1. The Board hereby recognizes and commends the members of the following local departments and agencies who tirelessly and selflessly responded to and diligently assisted with the skillful response to the devastating fire of March 16: City of Raleigh Fire Department; City of Raleigh Development Services; Town of Apex Fire Department; Bay Leaf Fire Department; Town of Cary Fire Department; Durham Highway Fire Department; Eastern Wake Fire Department; Fairview Volunteer Fire Department; Town of Fuquay-Varina Fire Department; Garner Volunteer Fire & Rescue; Town of Holly Springs Fire Department; Town of Rolesville Fire Department; Stony Hill Rural Fire Department; Swift Creek Fire Department; Town of Wake Forest Fire Department; Town of Wendell Fire Department; Wake County Emergency Medical Services; Wake County Fire Services (Response Division and Emergency Management Division); Western Wake Fire Rescue; and Town of Zebulon Fire Department.

Section 2. Copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the local departments and agencies named above.

Duly adopted by the Board of Directors of the North Carolina League of Municipalities this 4th day of May, 2017.

SC
Talk
of our
Towns

Time to Recharge? Towns Will be Ready for You and Your Car

Between Main Street’s flowering trees and the patchwork facades of historic buildings, the Shute Family Parking Garden provides about 60 parking spaces for downtown Monroe. Soon, the parking garden will become even more green when the city installs its first electric vehicle charging station.

A new charging station at the Shute Family Parking Garden in downtown Monroe, will allow two electric vehicles to charge at once. Monroe is one of about 80 cities and towns in North Carolina to receive a Duke Energy grant to install electric vehicle charging stations. The Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Project is investing $1 million to help municipal governments add about 200 charging stations in the state—a 30 percent increase.

The grant, announced in December 2016, provides up to $5,000 for each charging port and was part of a recent settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and environmental groups. Most city governments will install two ports with the grant, but some, including Kinston, are installing up to five. Monroe voted in June to install a station with two ports, allowing two vehicles to charge simultaneously.

Pete Hovanec, City of Monroe communications and tourism officer, said he hopes the stations there will attract travelers who need to recharge.

“It’s not only for tourists,” Hovanec said, “but for our residents as well.”

More than 170 electric vehicles have been registered in Union County since 2012, according to the North Carolina Department of Transportation. ChargePoint, the nation’s largest electric vehicle charging network, found that while most people charge their vehicles at work, the second most popular place to recharge in public is in cities and towns, and the third is at shops.

The new charging station will be steps from Main Street businesses— it will be especially convenient when renovations are complete at the historic Center Theatre. In 2013, the city purchased the theatre, which operated from 1940 until 1991, and a nonprofit is transforming it into a performing arts venue.

(This article is reprinted from Illumination, Duke Energy’s online magazine, and was written by former NCLM staff member Jessica Wells.)

Food Trucks Grow Fayetteville’s Food Scene

In partnership with the City of Fayetteville, the Center for Economic Empowerment and Development, or CEED, is hosting What the Truck! at Festival Park in Fayetteville every Wednesday May through October from 11am-2pm.
Local food trucks serve lunch to all of our local foodies. Trucks are located on the utility road in Festival park off of Ray Avenue. The first event kicked off on Wednesday May 31, when 4 food trucks served over 500 people. The second event held on Wednesday June 7th served another 550 people.

It started with a phone call from Mayor Nat Robertson to CEED Executive Director, Suzy Hrabovsky as he walked through Festival Park plaza. "Yes, sir. I think it would be a great idea to put Food Trucks in Festival Park. We would love to work on helping coordinate the food trucks downtown."

CEED’s Women's Business Director, Lexi Hasapis gathered our local food truck clients to a meeting at CEED to determine the desire to want to participate in a weekly food truck event in the park. The response was positive. The Mayor then moved forward and made a request to the City Council to extend the use of the park to the Food Trucks at a reduced rate to allow for the weekly rally.

Since the approval came down from City Council to use the space, Alyssa Hennessy, CEED’s Events and Promotions Director has been busy putting together the programming for “What the Truck!” (a CEED Culinary Business Incubator Program). The program was created with the following goals in mind: To promote and support the local food truck industry as part of CEED’s Culinary Business Incubator Project, to help realize the City of Fayetteville’s goal of creating an environment that promotes growth and engages the Fayetteville and surrounding community, to create a space where the community can eat, taste, enjoy, and support the vibrant local food truck industry and draw more customers to the downtown area. “I am excited to see the expansion of the partnership with the city to assist in the development of local food businesses. The city’s partnership in the funding for the CEED Culinary Incubator and now the establishment of a location for Food Trucks at Festival park shows a City that is truly invested in the incubation of small business,” stated Suzy Hrabovsky, Executive Director at CEED.

Mayor Nat Robertson has been at the park weekly partaking in the lunch fun and making sure that the experience for everyone is a pleasant one. He even called on Parks and Recreation Director, Mike Gibson to ask if more seating could be added to the park area for more people to enjoy the outdoors.

Greenville Signs Sister Cities Agreement with Yeonsu-gu District of South Korea

The City of Greenville and the Yeonsu-gu District of Incheon, South Korea officially started a Sister Cities International Friendship City partnership on Monday, June 5, as mayors from each city participated in a signing ceremony. The ceremony was held at City Hall prior to the City Council meeting.

Then Greenville Mayor Allen Thomas and Yeonsu-gu Mayor Lee Jae-Ho each signed the Friendship City Agreement which notes that the two cities will pursue joint development by working on
exchanges and cooperation in diverse fields, including but not limited to economy, education, and culture. The agreement is the first of its kind for Greenville, which formed the nonprofit Sister Cities Association of Greenville, North Carolina in March.

“We are pleased to be entering into this partnership with Yeonsu-gu,” Thomas said. “There are a lot of things that our two cities can learn from one another and a lot of opportunities for collaboration that will be mutually beneficial to both cities. We are looking forward to sharing our experience in education, medicine, government, business, and culture.”

Mayor Lee was among seven members of a delegation from Yeonsu-gu that arrived in Greenville on Sunday night and toured various areas of the city on Monday and Tuesday. The group made stops at Vidant Medical Center, the East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine Cardiovascular Robotics Training Center, Grady-White Boats, East Carolina University’s main campus, and Pitt Community College. A group from Yeonsu-gu also visited Greenville in November 2016 when talks of a Sister Cities agreement were first initiated.

During Monday’s ceremony, Lee said he was impressed with the historic aspects of Greenville, which Yeonsu-gu lacks, and he noted that he is excited to begin planning exchanges that will benefit future generations.

“I believe we have made the very first steps for the future of our children in both cities,” Mayor Lee said.

During Monday’s ceremony, Mayor Lee presented Mayor Thomas with an ornate porcelain vase, and Thomas presented Lee with a hand-carved clock that included two clock faces, one for Greenville time and one for Yeonsu-gu time.
Walltown Park Enhancement Project Wins $20,000 ‘Meet Me at the Park’ Grant for Local Park

Walltown Park Enhancement Project in Durham has been selected as a winner of the national Meet Me at the Park campaign and will receive a $20,000 grant from the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and The Walt Disney Company, including Disney Citizenship, Disney's locally owned station ABC11 WTVD and ESPN.

Community members voted for the winning project throughout Earth Month in April. Meet Me at the Park helps to revitalize and restore local parks and park programs across the country. These park projects will connect kids to nature, inspire healthy living and provide access to sports. The campaign was promoted on social media, ABC Television Network, ABC11 WTVD, Freeform, Disney Channel, Disney XD, Disney Junior, the ABC app and other digital platforms.

The Walltown Park Enhancement Project was one of 16 park improvement projects selected to receive grant funding. This project is designed to increase recreation opportunities to the surrounding neighborhood and all residents of Durham. This project will benefit all residents of Durham, but the largest benefit will come to those residents in close vicinity of Walltown Park. There is a strong community connection at this park, and these improvements will help to continue to foster those relationships. Providing new and improved park amenities will increase the opportunities for physical activity, wellness, and social involvement within the community.

The basketball courts in Walltown Park are one of its most popular and utilized features. Yet they are in need of resurfacing and replacement of the existing goals. The basketball courts will be resurfaced and the goals will be replaced. This project will promote healthy living by providing new options for physical activity.

New adult fitness equipment will be installed near the playground to give caregivers the opportunity to exercise while supervising children on the playground. Additional horseshoe pits will also be installed to provide another option for passive recreation. Recreation staff will program tournaments for mature adults (including Durham Senior Games), adults, and families that visit the park.

“We would like to thank the community for voting,” said Rhonda B. Parker, director of Durham Parks and Recreation. “Walltown Park is a highly used park and serves as a destination for physical fitness activities and recreation.”

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Apex  
continued from page 5

Station Apex will be operational in early 2018. In the meantime, Apex Economic Development is continuing to field inquiries for co-working space and will be involved in the on-going marketing and success measurements of the initiative to ensure its long-term presence and sustainability. In the end, Apex intends to assist the businesses that start at the co-working facility find their future, permanent locations within town limits, thus fulfilling the mission of Apex Economic Development to promote local job creation and capital investment.  SC

Taking the Field  
continued from page 48

League has been involved with over the past 12 months. But as we continue to align ourselves to our Vision 2030 strategic visioning plan and its principles like helping municipalities adapt to cultural and demographic and technological change, you can bet you will see more of the same from us over the next 12 months, and the 12 months after that.  SC

Trust Perpective  
continued from page 29

lifting aids for first responders, sign packages for highway safety, intrusion alarms for remote buildings, etc… The key element is that the item will be used to reduce injures or mitigate liability exposures.

7) Employment Practices Liability Telephonic Assistance: The Property-Liability Trust is developing a new program where the Trust will pay for consultation with a private practice employment law specialist in an attempt to prevent a claim being filed under the theory that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

The above programs are available to members of the various NCLM self-insurance risk pools. If your municipality is not yet a member, please call the League and one of our Member Relations representatives would be happy to meet with you.  SC

Legal Eagles  
continued from page 22

efficiency will likely vary from town to town.

We recommend that municipalities consider these changes in the context of reviewing their policies and procedures for responding to records requests.  SC

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Deputy Town Clerk – The Town of Valdese is currently seeking a qualified applicant for the Deputy Town Clerk position. This position performs all statutory responsibilities of a Town Clerk and the duties include but are not limited to preparing agendas, coordinating and maintaining a permanent record of Council actions including historical and current official records, and researching and preparing various reports and other office activities such as preparing ordinances, resolutions and proclamations. Work also includes serving as administrative support to the Town Manager, Mayor, and Council. The employee works under the general supervision of the Town Manager. Work requires a high level of discretion and often requires the use and handling of confidential information. Associates degree in business, public administration or related field is required and experience in the safekeeping and care of public records preferred; or an equivalent combination of education and experience. Certification as a Certified or Master Municipal Clerk and Notary Public are a plus, but not required. Salary depends on qualifications. This position will remain open until filled. For any questions, please contact Town Manager Seth Eckard at 828-879-2116. A full job description of the position and applications are available at www.townofvaldese.com. Submit application, resume, cover letter, and three references to Debbie Jones, Human Resources Officer, PO Box 339, Valdese, NC 28690 or email: djones@valdesenc.gov. Deadline to apply: Open until filled. First round of interviews can be expected July 19 and 20, 2017. The Town of Valdese is an Equal Opportunity Employer. The Town Of Valdese does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, religion, national origin, physical or mental disability, age, sexual orientation.

Scholarships are available thanks to Local Government Federal Credit Union.
Reading this year’s National League of Cities’ annual State of the Cities report, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the awful lot of the North Carolina League of Municipalities’ efforts over the past year have been guided by many of the same concerns expressed by the nation’s city leaders in that analysis.

You can find an article, NLC State of Cities: Economic Development a Top Priority, on page 38 of this edition of Southern City that summarizes the report. Each year, the report looks at the state-of-city addresses from dozens of the nation’s mayors and uses those remarks to assess the pressing issues and challenges faced by municipalities across the country. Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane and Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo are among the mayors whose speeches were analyzed.

This year’s results show that topics associated with economic development, public safety and infrastructure topped the list of the mayors’ concerns.

The efforts of an organization like the League should parallel the larger national challenges expressed in an analysis like the one compiled by NLC. Nonetheless, I think we can take some amount of satisfaction in how concerted and out front several of our initiatives have been in these areas.

As I have discussed before in this column, NLC has made it a point to cite this League’s efforts around the Here We Grow promotional campaign and focusing public attention on municipal investments that spark economic growth as an effective means to change the narrative around cities. We should be talking about the great work that cities and towns are doing when it comes to working on projects designed to generate commerce or enhance the quality of life that makes communities attractive to residents.

Obviously, mayors across the country are making the same points, emphasizing that cities and towns are the engines of the economy. Like us, they are talking about job creation, downtown development, but also the need for continuing partnerships with other levels of government and the private sector to move the economic dial. And they recognize the challenges in creating policies that help all types of towns.

Hand-in-hand with those discussions of economic development, of course, is infrastructure investment, another key topic for the nation’s mayors. The League provided members and private sector partners with a prime opportunity to examine cutting-edge infrastructure – from smart-city practices to green approaches to services to evolving transportation solutions – at a day-long Infrastructure Symposium that we hosted back in May. And we furthered the policy conversation around new small cell wireless technology and how it would be deployed through a series of regional forums around the state.

As the nation’s mayors focused on tensions between police and residents, the League was there, with members of the North Carolina Legislative Black Caucus, holding a forum to look at policy solutions that might ease these tensions. The forum featured a look at the League’s own risk assessment process for police departments in our property and liability insurance pool, as well as a panel of law enforcement leaders and trainers to discuss larger state policy ideas and the challenges of effective law enforcement.

That forum – again paralleling the sentiments expressed by the nation’s mayors – drilled down into officer training and recruitment, and we think made a difference as state leaders began to look at legislative solutions.

The efforts that I have highlighted here are just a few of those that the continued on page 46
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