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Karen Alexander
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Southern City

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Back in the fall, we published what was believed to be my last column as president of this organization. It was one that looked back over the last year of accomplishment of your North Carolina League of Municipalities, and how we have continued to evolve into a mission-driven organization that is playing a key role in helping cities and towns meet the challenges created by tremendous economic and societal change.

Of course, that was before Hurricane Florence, and the damage that the storm brought to many parts of North Carolina, and before we made the difficult decision to postpone CityVision 2018, our annual conference. With that decision came another: extending out my term and those of our other officers and board members so that they would coincide with the annual conference and our annual business meeting now planned for May.

So, now, this column comes as what will be my final one in Southern City. You will notice that there are a few other changes in the magazine, including a new column that will feature different faces from the organization to let you know a bit more about different aspects of League operations. The magazine also is moving to a quarterly publication schedule, putting it more in line with similar organizations as we and they turn to more frequent use of social media, podcasts and other communications to connect with members and the public.

More than a year ago now, when I took the oath of office as president, I knew that doing so was a commitment, one that involved both helping to steward general League operations and bolstering our advocacy efforts by better connecting with legislators. The commitment extended beyond my expectations with the extension of my term, but I remain proud of the many organizational accomplishments during that time.

That commitment, of course, is not so different from that made by all elected officials and board members so that they would coincide with the annual conference and our annual business meeting now planned for May.

We learn from mentors and others as young people, absorbing advice and ideas. We learn from experience, sometimes pleasant and sometimes not. And often, we learn without even recognizing that we are doing so.

For me, my experiences as a young Marine were a part of this learning process. Then as a business owner in Jacksonville. And then, being slowly pulled into community leadership roles that touched on and drew from those past experiences.

Through that learning and those past experiences, you begin to recognize needs in your community. And that builds that commitment to service.

Every municipal leader has their own story, their own mentors and their own experiences, helping each to recognize those community needs, how you can help fellow citizens.

Each of you has your own story. You have your own mentors and experiences that helped you to see those community needs. And those experiences led to your own commitment to service.

We all can take pride in that commitment. But I also challenge all locally-elected officials to think beyond your city or town.

continued on page 43
Sanford Contributes to Megasite Effort

The Sanford City Council has awarded approximately $12 million in construction contracts to extend the City of Sanford’s wastewater collection system to the Moncure Megasite. Located near the intersection of Old U.S. 1 and U.S. 1, the 2,500-acre North Carolina Certified Site is a cooperative endeavor between the City of Sanford and Chatham County. It is expected to serve as an economic development catalyst that will benefit Chatham, Harnett, Lee, and Wake counties, the central Carolina region, and the state as a whole.

“Working together with the City of Sanford to fully develop the Moncure Megasite builds on both of our strengths,” says Diana Hales, chair of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. Connecting the site to the Big Buffalo Wastewater Treatment is a fundamental component of making it competitive across the state and nation, she says. The megasite has also benefited from a $4 million Golden LEAF Foundation grant awarded to the City of Sanford to support sewer infrastructure.

The grant was part of the foundation’s Major Site Development Initiative, which aims to make North Carolina megasites more competitive by investing in the infrastructure necessary to appeal to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). “With this investment in sewer, the Moncure Megasite will be the most ready and quickest to the market of all sites in the Southeastern United States and the Carolina Core,” asserts Sanford Mayor Chet Mann. “Speed to market is crucial for companies in the 21st century global economy. Having a site that can meet their production timetable without risk to their schedule is essential to landing an OEM,” he says.

The Moncure Megasite developments nicely tie in with Lee County’s new Central Carolina Enterprise Park, a collaborative development between the City of Sanford, Lee County Government, and the private sector. The megasite is “the largest potential employment property in the state,” notes James Crawford, former chair of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. While increased employment will benefit surrounding counties, it also accomplishes Governor Cooper’s and the NC General Assembly’s mutual goals of job creation and tax base expansion.

“An OEM locating at the Moncure Megasite would be a game changer for our community,” Mann points out. “We believe this megasite will bring continued on page 43
Salisbury City Council Member Karen Alexander in the council chambers she designed for the city. The architect by trade did not charge the city for the services.

Photo credit: Ben Brown
Salisbury City Council Member Karen Alexander Says Philanthropy Comes in Many Forms

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

In giving credit, we often invoke the architect. “The architect of...” Usually, it’s the single mastermind or individual who did all the framing work to make something happen.

And while it’s easy to get metaphorical with the fact that Salisbury City Council Member Karen Alexander is indeed an architect by profession and is working earnestly for the appearance, structure and future of the city she cares about, it’s not in her character to take sole or central credit for any great development she’s worked on.

Instead, what Alexander repeatedly celebrated during Southern City’s recent visit with her in Salisbury was the local bounty of giving and civic involvement. Pointing to revitalized buildings, public sculptures, park projects and other initiatives around town, she never neglected to highlight how many different people or agencies participated to make them so, no matter their role.

“For a small town, as we are, we are just so fortunate and so blessed to have so many philanthropic people -- that mindset -- whether it’s with money or their time and talent,” Alexander said.

“Time, talent and treasure,” she continued. “I call it T to the third power, and it works.”

Alexander won election to the city council in 2013 and two years later served a term as mayor. (In this city, all candidates run for council, and council traditionally picks the top vote-getter among them to be mayor.) She remains on council, serves on the League’s Board of Directors, participates in volunteer efforts and has a history of community-focused positions. She said her family always put a premium on public service, and she’s carried that forward.

“If we are blessed, then we have to bless,” Alexander explained.

In December 2018, she gave the city council chambers its first design update in decades by providing her architectural services (at no cost). She made sure to base it on resource-friendly approaches and materials.
Today, it’s a slick, state-of-the-art chambers with audio and video componentry and modern lighting. (Fun side-fact: Salisbury City Hall is in an old bank building, and staff uses its vault as a paper archives room. The giant metal door is plainly visible in the council chambers.)

That project came with admirable effort from city staff, from assembly to grant-writing, to keep costs low, she said.

“As we all know, budgets are tight … so you have to find creative ways to achieve what you want,” Alexander said. “As an architect, I have to deal with budgets all the time; the other passion is planning.”

That’s important for a city on a motivated growth curve. Salisbury, currently home to about 34,000 people, already had a comprehensive plan when Alexander was mayor, but it was aging and needed updates.

“So we created a steering committee that was very diverse – young and old, racially diverse -- and every way we tried to do that to get these perspectives,” she said, adding that being inclusive across the community with planning can minimize chances of unintended consequences. That plan update is expected to go before council in mid-2019.

Salisbury’s community values are quickly apparent to visitors, especially downtown. In any direction are signs of historic preservation, arts and small business. Residents are on sidewalk benches sketching on paper, metal sculptures hold down street corners and squares, vintage brick murals are well preserved (the logo of Cheerwine, a hometown brand, is everywhere), and while nothing is bland or necessarily uniform about the area, there’s a cohesion that feels intentional or hive-minded.

“We have a real emphasis on our downtown,” Alexander said, describing
She pointed out how orderly the downtown business scene appears, thanks in some cases to façade grants the city awards shop owners – another example of partnership. The fine public art around them (and extending beyond downtown) is orchestrated by a public arts committee. The U.S. Conference of Mayors’ City Livability Awards honored the city’s outdoor sculpture program when Alexander was mayor in 2016.

To keep Salisbury on the up, Alexander is one of many community leaders engaged with workforce development and ensuring residents have the skills that existing or prospective businesses need. And that’s part of the greater plan, with council making grants available for economic development, to add with similar grants from Rowan County and the state, “to do major expansions on some of our industries,” Alexander explained. “It’s very exciting.”

She’s proud that Salisbury is working not in isolation, but in the spirit of regionalism, with the county and its municipalities having signed a

the care that city leadership has put into the area in hopes of charming newcomers and giving full-time residents plenty to do, see and eat. This North Carolina Main Street community has nearly 30 restaurants downtown in addition to four live theaters, leading Alexander to pitch Salisbury as “Paris of the Piedmont.”
“Declaration of Interdependence” while she was mayor. The area’s communities pledged mutual support in areas like economic development and quality of life, knowing that the betterment of one community helps others around it.

“We’re working together now, where there used to be this sense of competition,” said Alexander, adding that’s another way to be inclusive with community growth.

On that note, she’s long been involved with the local community development corporation, having served on its board of directors for more than two decades. She said she’s designed many of the area’s affordable houses pro bono, “because I believe that they should fit in to the neighborhoods, they should be something beautiful and attractive.” She added that some of the homes completed 20 years ago still have the same occupants. “It makes me so happy,” Alexander said.

While any member of the public might complain about shortcomings in a community, or one’s ability to effect change, Alexander doesn’t have a fear of stepping up and laying out a design. Seeing the homework gap in her county – made by students’ reliability on internet access and a lack of adequate service at home – she set up a program called Hot Spots, in which Alexander allowed high school kids to come to her office and use her internet service to study and complete assignments. The program grew when she recruited partners who expanded Hot Spots to other local businesses, and further when the local Communities in Schools (CIS) got a grant to give students hot-spot connections they could take home.

“So, again, by cooperating and collaborating, you’re leveraging resources in a way where CIS could directly impact the students’ opportunities,” said Alexander, adding that internet access is absolutely “essential” now, as much if not more than telephone service in its prime. (In related news, the city by referendum in 2018 leased its own 10-gigabit internet system to a private company that is now running the service and will pay the city a percentage of revenues.)

Greenway and parks development, better assets for local education, health, infrastructure, industrial recruitment and much more came into focus during the afternoon of Southern City’s visit, making for way more material than available page space. But she never broke with the theme of building on opportunities through collaboration and her inclusive definition of philanthropy.

“It takes everyone for a community,” Alexander said.

It disappoints her to see divisiveness between political leaders in times that need a more plural approach, she added. That’s why she loves serving at the local level, she said, because the needs of an individual community are often so apparent that they’re less likely to become political, and because anyone can effect change, no matter their level of income or bureaucratic experience.

“Everybody can contribute, and you don’t have to worry about whether it’s money,” Alexander said. “There are other types of treasure.”

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Facing Forward

Another Legislative Session is Upon Us

By Rose Vaughn Williams, NCLM Associate Executive Director of Public & Government Affairs

One of the truly great things about working for a member-led organization like the League of Municipalities is that you get to see up close how member engagement and involvement can really turn the tide on issues important to those members.

In 2017, as much work as I and my dedicated Public & Government Affairs team did to stop harmful, industry-backed billboard legislation from advancing, it was really the involvement of municipal officials, calling or otherwise contacting their legislative representatives to explain the issue, that made the difference. Those relationships that each of you has with your legislators – whether personal, professional or simply as a representative of your municipality – are so crucial.

As we begin a new legislative session, I have little doubt that those connections will again prove vital regarding so many of the policy priorities approved by member cities and towns, as well as the myriad of other issues that will inevitably arise affecting municipalities.

Those policy priorities were approved late last year at our Advocacy Goals Conference (see Transportation, Broadband Top Focus of Municipalities for 2019-20 Legislative Session, pages 12-14). As NCLM President Michael Lazzara remarked at the time, it is that collective involvement by towns and cities of all shapes and sizes, working together with one voice, that gives these policy goals their power.

By having a goal-setting process that involved well over 200 municipal officials, we can make the case to legislators, regardless of where they are from, that these priorities are representative of the needs and aspirations of the cities and towns in their districts.

In that list of 17 Municipal Advocacy Goals, I believe we have a strong and grounded set of priorities that legislators will recognize as addressing meaningful needs that can help cities and towns better serve their residents.

So many of those priorities focus on infrastructure of all types -- including that affecting transportation, storm water and the 21st century infrastructure challenge of our time, broadband. That focus is understandable. We know that the tremendous population shifts and economic changes that have come to pass over the past few decades have created significant infrastructure challenges, whether in booming metropolitan areas adding new residents every day or in the towns that suffered mill closings and property tax base and job losses over 20 years and are now attempting to reinvent their local economies.

Importantly, our legislators recognize the depth of these challenges.

But even as strong and well-grounded as these policy priorities are, we must recognize that we won’t get everything that we want. Like every advocacy organization, our political capital has its limits. So, we will have to make strategic choices.

With your help, engagement and guidance, I am confident that we can achieve a lot in the legislative session ahead. So, let’s get to it. SC
Transportation, affordable housing and broadband were among key focuses of the more than 200 municipal officials who gathered in Raleigh in late November to approve advocacy goals ahead of the 2019-20 legislative session.

In all, those municipal officials, representing more than 100 cities and towns, approved 17 Municipal Advocacy Goals during the League’s Advocacy Goals Conference. The approval of these legislative priorities marked the culmination of months of work by the League’s three policy committees, as well as the organization’s Board of Directors, as

municipal officials considered, debated and refined dozens of proposed goals submitted by member municipalities.

“This effort and this process is so important because it allows us to speak with a unified voice,” said NCLM President and Jacksonville Mayor Pro Tem Michael Lazzara. “By working as one, and speaking as one, we advance all. And it is that process – coming together today and working on these goals collectively through our representative committees – that gives these goals power.”

The approved legislative priorities include one that calls for state distributions for city-maintained roads, known as Powell Bill funding, to be sustained and grow over time, and another more general goal calling for additional funding for public transit and transportation programs. In recent years, Powell Bill distributions have been flat, even as road maintenance costs have increased.

A separate goal approved by municipal representatives calls for legislation granting local governments the authority to build broadband infrastructure and to partner with private internet service providers using long-term infrastructure leases. That measure falls in line with recent League efforts focused on creating better broadband access for residents and businesses.
The conference included Gov. Roy Cooper speaking to municipal officials about hurricane recovery, with the governor noting that Republicans and Democrats set aside partisan differences to approve a comprehensive recovery package. Cooper predicted further cooperation as a result of the November elections, and pointed out that as Senate majority leader in the late 1990s – when the Senate was controlled by Democrats and the House by Republicans – he has already worked in a political environment where party cooperation was necessary.

He also praised municipal officials for being on the front lines of hurricane response and recovery. And Cooper endorsed the idea that municipalities need more flexibility to set their own course. “I am not just saying this. You will see this in my actions,” the governor said.

Other speakers at the event were Melodee Colbert-Kean, past president of the National League of Cities and a City Council member from Joplin, Missouri, who spoke about her city’s recovery from a devastating 2011 tornado, and State Treasurer Dale Folwell, who addressed his efforts to ensure the fiscal integrity of the state and local government pension system.

The goals, as approved, follow:

**Public Infrastructure**
- Seek legislation granting local governments the authority to build broadband infrastructure and to partner with private internet service providers using long-term infrastructure leases.
- Seek legislation to ensure that the amount of Powell Bill funds appropriated by the state are sustained and distributions to municipalities are increased and grow over time.
- Seek legislation to boost funding availability for public transit and transportation programs.
- Seek legislation to provide additional grant funding to municipalities for equipment and facility needs for public safety (fire, police, ems).
- Support measures, such as additional funding, to enhance cities’ ability to meet federal and state stormwater control mandates.

**Fiscal Health and Economic Growth**
- Seek legislation that provides additional tools and financial resources for addressing the affordable housing crisis.
- Seek legislation to alter the current statutes governing distribution of local sales tax revenue.
- Seek legislation to provide municipalities with authority for additional locally-controlled revenue options and flexibility in the use of those options, including – but not limited to – city-only sales tax, city occupancy taxes, prepared meals taxes, and impact fees for transportation.
- Seek legislation that supports adequate, fair school funding between state and county in all school systems across the state by repealing municipal authority to fund schools.
- Support legislation which defends the fiscal integrity of the Local Government Employees’ Retirement System and its defined benefit structure, promotes reasonable pension reforms that are prospective...
in nature, and meets the needs of local employees, employers, and retirees.

- Support legislation that will provide sufficient funding at the state level for incentive programs such as a competitive film incentive program, state historic preservation tax credits, and the Main Street Solutions fund necessary to grow jobs and the economy.
- Only support legislation providing additional post-employment benefits to public employees that includes a funding mechanism to fully support the cost and liability of the benefit and support the study of existing post-employment benefits, such as special separation allowance programs, to ensure that the liability of providing the benefit isn't solely borne by the last employer.
- Support legislation to revise the current methods of determining economic needs that are used by the state to allocate funds so that additional areas of the state in need may benefit from increased economic development, jobs, and see more entrepreneurial innovation.
- Support a system of spirituous liquor sales that maintains a local referendum about the decision to sell, preserves local control over the location and density of outlets, and preserves the local revenue stream.

**Municipal Authority**

- Oppose legislation that shifts to taxpayers the costs of overseeing development and completing development-initiated infrastructure.
- Oppose legislation that interferes with local management or ownership of local assets.
- Seek changes to the law governing the disclosure and release of law enforcement recordings to clarify that disclosure to a municipal manager is allowed and to allow disclosure to a city or town council or citizen review board in a closed session and under confidentiality agreements.  

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The 2020 Census – to collect basic but useful data on every last person in the U.S. – is just a year away, coming with new features and challenges that will set it apart from decennial headcounts of the past.

And while it may be a federal program, experts say local leaders have a big hand in its outcome.

“They do know the populations. They know who’s within their community,” said Alex Jones, a close follower of census issues in his role as Local Democracy Initiative Manager at the National League of Cities. Accurately documenting a community as such with healthy participation in the every-10-year-census is important to that community’s future. Population and other demographic figures influence grant-pool access and other resources that help municipalities, counties and states.

“This is not really something that we do to benefit the federal government,” said Governor’s Census Liaison Bob Coats of the N.C. Office of State Budget and Management. “It’s something that we do to benefit our own communities.”

But rallying up public participation in the census is an enduring challenge. That’s why the Census Bureau is pulling out all the stops, carefully, to make 2020 a benchmark year.

For starters, initial prep for the 2020 Census began before the last one, in 2010, with staffers noting elements that could be improved upon or delivered differently the next time around. The Bureau has also done live tests of the 2020 delivery and organizational methods with actual U.S. communities.

“The goal of the tests was to prove in the systems and the operations for the census,” said Burton Reist, the Bureau’s chief of decennial communications.

And at least one component is a big, big deal.

We may be used to the door-knocking part of a decennial census, and that’s coming up, but this year will be the first to request survey responses online. Photo credit: U.S. Census Bureau
"This will be the first census in which the majority of Americans are asked to complete the census information online," said Sunshine Hillygus, a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University. That's huge, she said, because it may influence how individuals regard the census.

"Asking for information online is a different experience than filling out a form," Hillygus explained. "It can raise different concerns about privacy and confidentiality."

Reist said the Census Bureau and partner agencies have worked hard to ensure the online census response portal is safe and secure so respondents can comfortably take advantage of cyber convenience.

"Many government operations are now conducted online, and we will ensure that people's data are safe," Reist said. "We encrypt our data from the point of collection all the way to tabulation and processing."

He emphasized the data are not used in any way beyond statistics; no personal information can be legally shared. "We stress that continually," said Reist.

But hesitancy to participate in the decennial census may remain for any number of reasons, which is why federal and state officials appreciate the involvement of local government leaders who can help to reach historically hard-to-count populations and ensure communities are accurately represented in the influential results.

Different levels of government across the U.S. are partnering with community representatives in "complete count commissions," one of which Gov. Roy Cooper set up in October 2018 with an executive order and news release listing 24 members from government, faith, healthcare, education and nonprofit circles. Chapel Hill Mayor Pam Hemminger is among them.

Said Gov. Cooper, "I appreciate these Commission members stepping up to work with community leaders and partners across the state to encourage a full and fair count of all our residents—from our biggest cities to our smallest, rural communities."

The Census Bureau and these complete-count commissions are preparing for public outreach and education efforts to show how important solid census results are.

"The estimates are showing, as of last year, about $1,623 per person per year in federal funds come back to North Carolina based on census counts in some way, shape or form, so we definitely want to make sure everyone's counted to bring those tax dollars back to serve our needs—and that's just federal dollars," said Coats.

He added that census data helped tremendously in recent years in how governments deployed relief to hurricane-ravaged areas.

"It really does have implications for how much money a city does receive," said Jones. "But really, it's in the interest that not only your city gets counted well, but that your neighboring cities get counted, that your region gets counted, that your state, that your country gets counted accurately."

Census officials are encouraging mayors and council members to begin having these conversations with their residents.

More information is at census.gov/2020census. Listen to Episode 60 of the League's Municipal Equation podcast for a deeper look. SC
Visit Rep. Gale Adcock’s legislative profile on the website of the N.C. General Assembly, and you’ll see something different. While most members are dressed coat-and-tie or blouse-and-scarf in their photos, this lawmaker is in a white lab coat with a stethoscope slung around her neck.

The photo and the reality of her actual job and her legislative job represent a perfect fit, said the nurse practitioner by trade. So much of the government’s policy portfolio intersects with health in one way or another. You can’t have a prosperous state without it. It informs and inspires her civic approach, helping keep the welfare of people in focus. And so it also makes sense that she began her public-office experience at the local level, on the Cary Town Council, where she applied her nurse’s sensibility to diagnose problems and work on difficult or time-sensitive situations.

Rep. Adcock agreed to meet up with Southern City and discuss that tie-in, how local government experience benefits her as a legislator, and what compelled her to run for state elected office in the first place – all while maintaining a busy career in healthcare.

Bringing local government experience to the legislature – what made you want to cross that bridge?

It was a hard decision to make. I had been on the Cary Town Council for seven years, and I really enjoyed that work. And even as much as the work, I enjoyed the people that I worked with, the six other members of council and the staff. But moving from the local level to the state level gives me the opportunity to have more direct impact on health policy. Being a nurse of over 40 years and a nurse practitioner of over the 30, I have a great interest in that and the other state policies that have a direct impact on health, although they’re not labeled health -- those social determinants of health: how much education someone gets and how difficult it is or not difficult it is to get an education, leading you to being
able to be employed in a way that can support yourself and your family. And we know education level and income level track with good health outcomes. That was a big piece. And the other part, our district at the time ... was not being represented in a way that I thought it should be, and so when approached to run, I said “OK.”

**Getting to the legislature, can you think of times when having that local government or nursing appreciation came into play?**

Oh my gosh, every day. To be honest, in addition to the way I look at issues -- nurses are good critical thinkers -- my time in local government really informs everything I do in the legislature.

Because I read bills with an eye toward what impact, if any, good or bad, will this bill have on local government. Is it something that is kind of expressly stated in the bill? Or is it nuanced to where you have to know what you’re reading to understand it? So I look at everything through a local government lens, as well as through a nursing and health care lens. And I’m looking for things that will help local governments do their job and help them take care of their citizens, development of land and all those things, as well as things that could hurt local government. I represent three towns in my district -- Apex, Cary, Morrisville -- and I reach out to staff and council of those three municipalities and I ask, have you seen House Bill Fill-in-the-Blank? What do you think about Section Three? The way I read it, it looks like it’s going to inhibit your ability to do whatever, and they will give me great feedback -- sometimes on the floor of the House as we're getting ready to take a vote. Because, as you know, often, the (legislative) calendar was
one group of bills, and you don't know that a bill just got heard in (committees like) Local Government or Judiciary or Transportation, and it's coming to you for a vote and you look at it and go, "Oh my gosh. This wasn't discussed in caucus." People who haven't been in local government often don't pick up on these things. And my job of course is to serve the citizens of my district, but it's also to help the towns of my district do their jobs.... I actually think it should be a prerequisite that you have some kind of local government experience before you run for the legislature (laughter), whether that's your town or city council, school board, county commission -- something.

In the days before your local elected experience, were the people of Cary already familiar with you? Whether as a nurse or....?

They knew me as a nurse, but I had not been as civically involved as many people who had run for council. Many people have served on Planning and Zoning (commissions), or have served on Parks and Rec, or had gone through their local school of government, which is a Town of Cary thing. A lot of folks who had run for office had done those things, and I really never had the opportunity because I had two young children and a full-time job, which I still have, that kept me traveling a lot. I felt that was the only disadvantage I had when I ran the first time. I didn't have the same recognition that one of my opponents had … but what I lacked in that I made up for because of my nursing background. You know, nurses are pretty fearless people. Any time you walk into a room with patients .... you don't know what you're going to find. You've got to be fast on your feet, you've got to be quick-thinking. I can get people to talk to me about things that are difficult to talk about often. So those things really helped me a lot the first time that I ran for office.

Looking back at your time in local office, what stands out in memory as, “This is something we got done”?

First of all, I love the way you asked that question. “This is something WE got done.” Because so often I hear politicians say, “Look what I did.” There's nothing one person does. Even the mayor. Nobody does anything by themselves. Some of the things I was able to be part of, particularly, was downtown revitalization. The acquiring of the land for the downtown park took many years and predated my term of council at the beginning, but it was brought home during my time on the town council and that took a lot of fortitude and a lot of money, because the land prices kept going up. And when we got to that last parcel, it was very expensive. And there's a part of any government or group decision, where you feel like you just don't know if this is going to be the biggest good thing we ever do or worst thing we ever do. And you have to have a lot of faith and you have to have guts. Of course, that led to the development of that first critical acre of the park, which is where the fountain is
and the gathering space and... that was a really great thing and many good things are going to come from that. Prior to that was the decision of the town to redevelop the old Cary High School and turn it into the Cary Arts Center. The old high school had been purchased by the town many years ago and it was falling down. And so right in the heart of the recession, our council made the decision to put that building out to bid for renovation, and we got criticized by many who thought you shouldn't be doing this in a recession.... Well, the bids came back way under what we thought we would have to spend, and we got this wonderful result that's like a hub of the community.

**In that spirit of getting things done together, what are you looking forward to in the legislature in 2019?**

I'm looking forward to working with a lot of the folks I've worked with the last four years, and that's on both sides of the aisle.... We have relationships and we can agree to disagree and we can also take those disagreements and work on things. Particularly I'm interested in increasing our citizens’ access to health insurance. Because we have at least a million people, in a state of 10 million people, who don't have access to health insurance, and when you don't have access to health insurance, many bad things happen. One is you either don't get any care until you're so sick or near death it becomes an expensive proposition that could cost you your life. But also you seek care in places that really are not the most appropriate places for you to seek care. And that usually is your only recourse with no health insurance: the emergency room. Because emergency rooms cannot turn you away. There's a federal law ... that says (if) you come in, I have to take care of you. I may not take care of everything you need done, but I have to take care of your most emergent problem.... What doesn't happen is their chronic illnesses aren't diagnosed and treated, their hypertension, their diabetes, their depression, and then they go on to become extremely sick, and it has huge impact on themselves, their families and their communities. By extending, in however form or forms in takes, extending health insurance to people, it not only helps individuals, but it will help our hospitals, which are getting huge amounts of uncompensated care, and it's killing them financially.... At these rural hospitals, it could be their death. And so that is certainly bad for the hospital, and it's bad for the patients who have nowhere to go, but it's also bad for the communities because hospitals are often the biggest employer in the community.... On top of that, trying recruiting a business into your county when you don't have hospital. To me, that is a huge thing we can do to help individuals, communities, business, and the state in terms of economic development.

**What else fits into that? What other elements will help communities grow our state?**

The second thing is broadband. Broadband is absolutely necessary if you're going to have access to education. Because we have kids -- all the schools are connected, but they get home and they can't do their homework. So, the homework gap. It's critical for education, and it's critical for healthcare, healthcare delivery, but it's also critical for business. Because you can't push business or economic development into an area...
that doesn’t have broadband. Those things are so connected. And it’s not just about the new guy on the block. It truly is about helping current businesses survive. Most business in our state are small businesses. But those small businesses together are the backbone of the community... You need broadband for a lot of reasons.

**Is there something I haven’t asked that you think is important between local governments and the legislature?**

Here’s the question – How do local governments help their elected House and Senate members understand more of what they’re up against? And I have a little insight on that. This comes from both my nursing background and my local government background. It starts with relationships. If you show up in your legislator’s office as a town council member or a staff member, and the only time we see each other is when something is critical – like the only time you see your healthcare provider is when you’re having a heart attack -- it’s kind of hard to take care of all that other stuff. So the best place to start is before things become critical, with relationship-building. I know the League really works hard at this. Beyond those formal League days where you come to the General Assembly and meet with us, relationship-building usually happens one-on-one in the community over a cup of coffee or a sandwich for lunch or barbecue for dinner, where you talk and you don’t even ask for anything. You find out about each other’s families. What kind of hobbies do you have? What are you interested in? What’s in your background that I might not know? And then when you go to ask for something -- they go, oh, I know Ben, because he comes from my neck of the woods and his dad and my dad went to Rotary together, and I’ve talked to Ben about other issues and I know that he always thinks things through. It takes a lot of time. It’s not a one-time thing.

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As a new year begins, I am excited to serve the members of the League of Municipalities in my new role as the Associate Executive Director of Risk Management Services.

Some of you may already know that I come to the role with a little knowledge and background about the League, Risk Management Services and insurance and municipalities, having most recently served as the League's Director of Risk Control for nearly seven years. Overall, I have nearly 25 years of experience in various areas of municipal operations.

During my tenure as Director of Risk Control, I am proud of just how much we were able to accomplish in terms of helping members limit liability exposures, both saving them money and making employees and residents safer.

One of my primary focus areas has been on liability exposures associated with law enforcement operations. In 2012, I formed the League's Police Chiefs Advisory Committee to assist in the review of claims and evaluation of training programs to help police departments reduce accidents and injuries.

A significant accomplishment of the committee was the development of the Law Enforcement Risk Review. Risk control staff now reviews law enforcement policies, procedures and training to help our members comply with current case law and industry best practices. As a result, the League is now able to offer our members valuable services such as police driver training, use of force training and constitutional law courses. The risk review has been well received and was endorsed by the North Carolina Association of Chiefs of Police.

Another major focus over the last several years has been developing tools to analyze the large volume of data associated with workers’ compensation and property and casualty claims. These tools have allowed risk management consultants to identify target areas for loss control activities and expand the consulting services we provide for human resources and employment liability.

My time at the League was only the latest phase of my professional involvement with local government. Prior to joining the League, I served as the General Manager of Safety and Security for the City of Charlotte and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System.

I also have experience in law enforcement, having worked seven years in state and local law enforcement positions.

As we push into the future, I look forward to working with the team of League professionals that supports the insurance programs and our goal to work as one while advancing all. With direction from the insurance pools’ Board of Trustees, we will continue to evaluate the workers’ compensation, property and casualty and health insurance programs to try to make each the best it can be.
Ensuring You Have the Proper Insurance Protection

By Kristin Milam, NCLM Creative Services Strategist

The past year has been a busy one for the League of Municipalities’ Risk Management Services, none more so than the Property and Casualty Trust. Not only did we work through – and are still handling – the aftermath of two major hurricanes, but 2018 also marked the completion of the first year in a five-year appraisal process for our member cities and towns.

So, what does that mean exactly? Basically, we want to make sure that our members have exactly the coverage protections they need, and we have the information we need to make that happen. “In 2017, the League engaged a company to begin a five-year appraisal process in order to ensure the values carried by each member were accurate and current,” explained Bryan Leaird, Associate Executive Director of Risk Management Services. “We analyzed a lot of data and evaluated our exposure levels to determine if an on-site appraisal process was necessary and beneficial to members and the trust. In the end, we decided this review process would be worth the time and expense, and ultimately better protect members.”

League staff began working directly with cities and towns and other insured members to go through their coverages, making sure that everything on paper aligned with the reality onsite. For example, are the properties that your policy covers still the properties your town owns? Aligning property schedules is important to do frequently – and members are reminded to do so annually upon renewal and throughout the year – but sometimes things are
inadvertently left off or added without adjusting the policy.

Likewise, even if a property is included on the schedule, is its value accurately reflected? Unreported additions, changes, renovations, demolitions and sales of property can make the property schedule ebb and flow, but the appraisal process also gets at the changes that have occurred that affect replacement costs. For example, a town could have added a new fire station to their property schedule when it was built 10 years ago, but our appraisal process is meant to catch the fact that replacement costs have increased in that time. The cost to construct a new fire station today is significantly higher than it was just seven or eight years ago because of increased construction costs, both nationally and in the state, as well as new design standards that have evolved over time.

“While maintaining accurate property values is a direct goal, the benefits extend beyond what someone might think of when they hear the word ‘appraisal,’” adds Leaird. “Our underwriters, loss control staff and reinsurance providers benefit greatly from the enhanced knowledge of the exact nature of our members’ exposures.” Details on roof age, frame and type go a long way with regard to how properties are viewed and rated in the reinsurance world. Other property-specific data about HVAC systems, recent upgrades, structural details and life-safety concerns all help underwriters and loss control staff do their job better – and that helps us better protect members.

Finally, simply having a comprehensive and accurate Statement of Values is essential to ensuring that you are getting the best value for your coverage, meaning we don’t want our members paying to cover properties that they no longer own. Even more important, is the opposite concern – the risk that a property isn’t included in the coverage and not realizing it until after a loss occurs.

While systematic reappraisal inspections require staff commitment and participation on both sides of the process, the return on that investment provides better financial protection and risk management for the trust and its members. SC

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The North Carolina League of Municipalities has released its 2017-2018 Annual Report, which accounts for a full range of organizational activities, an examination of finances and an outlook from NCLM leaders. This condensed version of the report provides most of the content from the full version. You can find the full version at https://www.nclm.org/resource-library/Shared%20Documents/Annual%20Report%202018-Final-NoCuts.pdf or you may contact Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs, at (919) 715-9768 to obtain a hard copy.

Advancing All

A consistent theme for the North Carolina League of Municipalities during the 2017-18 year was the expansion of League-member services, focusing both on the effectiveness and value of these services for member cities and towns. It could be seen in how the organization exercised new levels of thought leadership, in the sharing of best practices utilizing new expertise and new communications formats, and through the range of League consultations. With this focus, NCLM was delivering at a strategic level that emphasized member needs amid a changing and challenging economic and demographic landscape in North Carolina.

In that vein, the new Municipal Operations Consultants program created a new standard of field-level assistance for cities and towns, with four regional consultants meeting individually with municipal officials in their municipalities – all free of charge – to help with finance and operational challenges.

A new Opioid Solutions Toolkit provided members with real-world solutions and advice from law enforcement and others on the front lines addressing the opioid crisis in the state. Meanwhile, an improved Preferred Partner program and a new “Member 360” dashboard of individual member services gave cities new services and new ways to look at the services they receive.

The 2017-18 year saw the League increase its level of thought leadership to new heights with the release of “Leaping the Digital Divide,” a comprehensive report on broadband access co-authored by League lobbyist Erin Wynia and national experts. The report was rolled out at a March news conference, to much publicity, as the League embarked in an initiative to seek state policy changes that better enabled public-private partnerships that could bring about faster and more reliable Internet service in more areas of the state.

Working under a revised Risk Managed Service agreement, the three insurance pools and other League departments worked more seamlessly together, the result seeing all three...
pools – particularly the Health Benefits Trust – exceed new member goals while thwarting competitive threats. RMS trustees approved their own strategic plan, while law enforcement programs designed to limit liability exposure were expanded.

The first ever Town & State Dinner was a huge success with legislators and League members, allowing networking and the breaking of bread among state lawmakers and their constituent municipal officials, an event that highlighted how state and local government can work together for common purposes that improve citizens’ lives. More than 200 League member-city representatives attended, along with more than 100 legislators.

Meanwhile, NCLM intervention in the Duke Energy rates led to a settlement and decision that saved over 384 towns and cities more than $2 million a year in energy costs while paving the way for LED light conversions and even more savings.

And during the 2018 legislative session, cities and towns saw the passage of legislation that promises to reduce blight, the approval following months of work on the issue by League staff with legislators, municipal officials and other stakeholders.

The formation of the N.C. Mayors Association, a League affiliate group, provided all mayors in the state with networking and idea-sharing opportunities.

In all, League staff organized and held more than 87 events consisting of in-person trainings, meetings and conferences for affiliates, along with the League’s annual conference, CityVision 2017, held in Greenville.

Operationally, the League overhauled and redesigned its website, upgraded financial systems, created electronic invoicing for League customers and an online payment system for League members and affiliates, while holding membership dues steady with no price increases.

**Political Advocacy**

The 2018 legislative session came and went as quickly as any in recent memory, as legislators were intent on getting back home as quick as possible given a very uncertain political landscape headed into the fall elections. That early ending came with the help of a truncated budget process that left individuals and organizations, including the League, with much less opportunity to weigh in on the budget’s components before the package received floor votes in the House and Senate.

While the governor vetoed the approved budget, the legislature’s supermajority quickly cast override votes and put the plan in law. Cities and towns did see wins, however.

They included:

- The adjusted budget maintained funding levels for municipal transportation projects and water and sewer work.
- The budget provided more than $3 million in revitalization grants for certain downtowns. It identified specific local economic development projects for aid. It transferred $60 million to disaster recovery, including $10 million for infrastructure grants that local governments can access.
- Local governments picked up a new tool for fighting commercial, industrial and residential blight, in a bill setting up a new process called “vacant building receivership.” It will allow a local government, under certain circumstances, to petition the court to appoint a receiver to take over management of the property and make improvements.

<Effective political advocacy and improving state-local relationships continued in 2017-2018. Photo credit: Ben Brown>
• The HOPE Act, building upon previous legislation, both tightens criminal penalties and creates procedures to allow law enforcement to better access pharmacy and other information that could indicate violations. The plan will also invest annually in naloxone supplies and community-based drug treatment and recovery services, while funding efforts to destroy unneeded prescription drugs.

• Another bill affecting substance abuse would help address a League goal of lessening the strain on local law enforcement when it comes to custody of those with behavioral and mental health issues. The legislation gives law enforcement officers more flexibility when they take custody of and transport individuals subject to an involuntary commitment order. It also calls for more collaboration between local mental health management entities and law enforcement in developing plans for how these commitments work.

• A consensus update was approved to 2017’s legislation that put into law uniform authorization for water and sewer system development fees, also called development impact fees. It clarified the authority to use system development fee revenues to repay bonds, shortening the window of time for projects to be included in the financial analysis that informs the fee amount, and stated more precisely the timing for payment of the fees.

Those gains, though, did not hide the fact how difficult the truncated budget process and brief session hindered the ability to seek legislative changes and full vetting of proposals. League staff and leadership spent time letting legislators know of specific concerns created by policy provisions that received little vetting, and of plans to continue working to address them.

**Duke Energy Rate Case**

While much of the League’s advocacy work focuses on the North Carolina General Assembly, its efforts in another area – before the N.C. Utilities Commission – may have led to some of the most significant results for cities and towns over the last year.

An agreement reached between the N.C. League of Municipalities and Duke Energy Carolinas should lead to substantial benefits to cities and towns in western North Carolina when it comes to street lighting and energy savings associated with newer street lighting technology. The settlement was reached as part of the Duke Energy Carolinas (DEC) rate case before the North Carolina Utilities Commission.
after the League intervened on behalf of its members and their interests. Also, the Utilities Commission has issued a final order granting Duke Energy Progress (DEP) a much lower rate increase than the company had requested for customers in the eastern part of the state and including other benefits to cities and towns. It was also a case in which the League intervened. Street lighting was not as critical a part of that case as in the DEC case, as rates and technology conversion processes were already more favorable.

In the DEC case affecting western North Carolina, the settlement will lower existing rates for traditional street lighting for cities and towns by over $2 million annually. It should also pave the way for faster, more efficient conversion to LED technology, saving money for municipal taxpayers and leading to more efficient energy use.

**Leaping the Digital Divide**

We know resilient broadband internet access is the missing or lacking ingredient with so many communities’ ambitions. We call it the “digital divide” or the “broadband gap” as we ponder how to connect these unserved or underserved communities to the modern internet speeds that businesses and residents increasingly need to succeed. The League took enthusiastic steps forward to close this gap on March 21 with the release of a report offering effective policy solutions. “Leaping the Digital Divide: Encouraging Policies and Partnerships to Improve Broadband Access Across North Carolina” debuted at a press event inside the Legislative Building with municipal officials and state legislators on hand for remarks.

Including Rep. John Szoka of Fayetteville, League President and Jacksonville Mayor Pro Tem Michael Lazzara, Angier Mayor Lew Weatherspoon, and Bolton Clerk Jacquelyn Hampton, the report’s supporters laid out the case for more widespread broadband infrastructure, which is possible on the strength of public-private partnerships as we all stand as stakeholders. “Broadband is crucial 21st century infrastructure, no different than water and sewer, electricity and roads,” Lazzara said. Representative Szoka agreed, adding it’s “absolutely necessary that we have to take the actions required to connect to every last house on the last dirt road, from the mountains to the sea in this state, to afford our citizens the opportunity to fully participate in a global economy.”

This report, which received prominent media coverage including a supportive editorial in the News & Observer, was co-authored by League Legislative Counsel Erin Wynia. The League will continue to work with stakeholders and lawmakers on this important issue.

**Judicial Advocacy**

FY 2017-18 was among the busiest in the history of our Appellate Advocacy Program. The program involves both the filing of amicus (friend of the court) briefs on issues of statewide importance to municipalities, and technical assistance designed to help cities better craft and position their arguments for eventual success at the appellate level. The League filed an amicus brief in one case and provided substantial technical assistance in ten others.

The League filed an amicus brief in *Meinck v. City of Gastonia* before the N.C. Supreme Court in a case involving the lease of a downtown building to a nonprofit arts program. In a suit over an injury on the property, the Court of Appeals ruled that the leasing arrangement made the activity proprietary—even though it operated at a loss for the city—and therefore not subject to a governmental immunity defense. In a big win for cities, the Supreme Court reversed in this case of first impression, finding that the revitalization effort in question was a governmental function and the city was entitled to assert immunity as a defense. Filing jointly with the N.C. Association of Defense Attorneys, the League drafted the governmental immunity portion of the arguments on which the Court’s opinion ultimately rested.
In providing technical assistance, the League's help may include legal research, review of the record, formulation and drafting of arguments, editing of briefs and motions, and moot court sessions to prepare counsel for appellate oral argument.

In another win for cities, a long-running impact fees case finally came to a close with a second Supreme Court ruling in *Quality Built Homes v. Town of Carthage*. In 2016, state's high court had first ruled that there was no statutory authority for municipalities to charge water and sewer impact fees to cover the future costs of expansion. The Court of Appeals subsequently determined that the statute of limitations on refunds would be 10 years, creating large potential financial exposure for local governments throughout the state. But on further appeal, the Supreme Court found that a three-year statute of limitations would apply. The League's property and liability insurance pool provided the defense for the town, so the League did not participate as amicus in the case. However, the League provided continuing and extensive technical assistance.

In addition to *Carthage*, several other cases in which the League provided technical assistance saw rulings during the year: *Tully v. City of Wilmington*, a challenge by an unsuccessful applicant for a police department promotion, resulted in an adverse Supreme Court opinion recognizing a state constitutional claim when a governmental unit fails to follow its own internal policies; in *Wilkie v. City of Boiling Spring Lakes*, a case involving a claim of inverse condemnation for flooding, the Supreme Court applied principles of statutory construction to reverse a Court of Appeals holding favorable to the city and remanded the case for further consideration; *Surgical Care Affiliates v. N.C. Industrial Commission* involved a challenge to the fee schedule for health care procedures under workers’ compensation, and the League’s workers’ comp insurance pool joined a coalition of employer groups as a named amicus, and the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the coalition’s position.

**CityVision 2017**

CityVision 2017, the League’s annual conference held in Greenville, included unforgettable presentations, recognitions, networking, idea-sharing, swearings-in and good laughs. The theme this year was Connect -- connecting to technology, new modes, and each other -- which the hundreds of attendees quickly took to heart.

Jacksonville Mayor Pro Tem Michael Lazzara was installed as president, and noted what a milestone year it had been for the League, one of tremendous and challenges. Speakers included Angelina Panettieri of the National League of Cities, whose talk on “Smart at Any Size” highlighted how smart-city technology and efficiency can be applied successfully in towns small or large. Sean Lilly Wilson of Durham’s Fullsteam Brewery explained how beer can be a catalyst for economic development, as breweries like his have driven revitalization in towns across the state.

Regionalism also came into focus, with speakers who discussed how urban cores can be strengthened by collaboration across city lines. Christopher Gergen of Forward Cities and Forward Impact impressed the importance of inclusive innovation and the ingredients that are often missed when it comes to spurring local economic development and entrepreneurialism.

**Town & State Dinner**

In the spirit of goodwill and partnership, municipal officials and legislators gathered together by the hundreds on May 29 for the League’s first-ever Town & State Dinner, held at the Raleigh Convention Center at the end of a busy day for the General Assembly. The event saw mayors, city council members and municipal staffers breaking bread and strengthening relationships with their senators and representatives while the state’s top leaders discussed priorities and the need to work together. The speakers for the event included Gov. Roy Cooper, House Speaker Tim Moore, Senate Majority Leader Harry Brown and Attorney General Josh Stein.
2018 League President Michael Lazzara, Mayor Pro-Tem of Jacksonville, set the tone for the event by noting that state and local government officials, in working toward their priorities that are ultimately focused on serving citizens, enjoy far more common ground than separate. He also spoke of the League as an evolving mission-driven organization focused on “serving the interests of towns and cities so that they can best serve their residents.”

2018 League Vice President William Pitt, Councilman from Washington, in remarks prior to introducing Attorney General Stein, noted how his city is leading in a fashion similar to other towns and cities across the state – leveraging its unique assets to remain economically vital. In Washington’s case, that means its waterfront and historic buildings.

In addition to Lazzara and Pitt, League Board of Directors members Scott Neisler, Mayor of Kings Mountain, and Liz Johnson, Council Member from Morrisville, spoke as part of the program, with Neisler introducing Moore and Johnson a League-produced video. That partnership was the theme of the night was affirmed in the video, which features many of our legislators and local officials discussing how they’ve worked together to accomplish great things. Said Goldsboro Mayor Chuck Allen in the video, “We are one North Carolina, and we’ve got to work towards being one North Carolina.”

**Opioid Solutions Toolbox**

By now, you may be aware of the League’s Opioid Solutions Toolbox – an online resource to better help member cities and towns address the epidemic of opioid abuse across the state. The Toolbox debuted in September 2018, but the story of its creation reaches far back into the year under the League-presidency of Jacksonville Mayor Pro Tem Michael Lazzara, who made mental health a primary focus for his term. For much of the year, the League’s staff and leadership worked together to identify and carry out this organization’s role in the crisis (which came with the intention of not duplicating or contradicting other efforts already on the ground). It included the formation of a staff committee whose members developed ideas, such as working with member police chiefs who are changing the conversations and practices in dealing with persons struggling with substance use disorders.

Production work for the toolbox and its contents — a seven-part video series, a full-length podcast episode and links to helpful outside resources — sent League staffers on field visits with the state attorney general’s office and with our featured police chiefs (Tom Bashore of Nashville and Bill Hollingsed of Waynesville) to capture their knowledge of the crisis and municipal solutions in a way that could be adaptable or scalable to cities and towns of any size. Said Lazzara, “By highlighting best practices that are already addressing opioid abuse head-on, we hope that you will find a solution that can work for you.”
Risk Management Services

The League's three self-funded insurance pools – the Workers' Compensation Trust, Property and Casualty Trust, and the Health Benefits Trust – continued to expand benefits and prioritize customer service.

We enhanced risk control services by adding a new Risk Control Consultant and realigning the state into four services territories up from three previously. Collectively, consultants made 730 visits to 330-plus members. Further, a new HR Consultant helped complete more than 170 employment liability consultations. The League also added telephonic employment liability services for members of the Property & Casualty Trust; these services provide five hours annually of legal consulting.

The League continued assisting law enforcement agencies with their unique risk management needs. The Police Chiefs' Advisory Committee reviewed law enforcement liability trends and identified use of force and constitutional law classes as needs. Members now have access to interactive Response-to-Resistance Simulator training that teaches the verbal interactive and proper decision-making skills needed to better serve their communities. The simulator training focuses on de-escalation essential to effectively responding to an individual who is actively resisting an officer. Further, over 60 police departments have participated in the law enforcement risk review process.

Our online safety and risk control training courses remain a popular – over 130 members accessed 13,000 individual courses. The League also deployed new claims analysis tools to help identify trends in the Workers' Compensation and Property & Casualty claims that will help facilitate risk control initiatives to mitigate liability exposures and reduce costs to the pools. These analysis tools will be available to members in a dashboard format.

Members of the Health Benefits Trust continued to participate in various wellness programs to keep employees healthier. These include the Naturally Slim weight loss program, TrestleTree tobacco cessation program, Teladoc access for virtual routine sick appointments, and Smart Starts maternity education for high risk pregnancies.

Grassroots Engagement

Grassroots engagement continued to be a priority for the League in 2017-2018 with staff encouraging significant and active communication between local officials and legislators. This personal approach to advocacy pays dividends when issues arise that affect cities and towns and their ability to make decisions at the local level.

The League's Grassroots Advocacy team coordinated training and workshops for municipal elected officials. In partnership with the School of Government, the League held Essentials of Municipal Government (EMG) sessions in Hickory, Chapel Hill, Sunset Beach, Asheville, and Greenville. For municipalities not able to attend one of the EMG sessions, the League held the Best Practices of Municipal Government in the Town of Franklin.

A series of Regional Roundtable events also provided elected officials the opportunity to learn about various municipal issues and discuss the challenges and potential solutions through the lens of a regional-based approach. Nearly 160 elected and appointed municipal officials representing 76 municipalities across the state attended one of 10 regional roundtables. Not only were these events helpful to encourage regional partnerships and networking, they also educated attendees about a wide variety of topics including water/sewer infrastructure, downtown revitalization, broadband, transportation, regionalism, open data and public information, changing community demographics, affordable housing, tourism and more.
Information Technology

During 2017-18, the League launched its new website with a modern look and feel, as well as better functionality, including a more responsive mobile design. Involving months of work by Information Technology and communications staff, the change also upgraded the software to the SharePoint 201 platform, allowing for better ease when it comes to updating the site. The changes also incorporated all League services under one website and improved user experience for staff and members.

Beyond those obvious and needed changes, the new site improved email security for League staff, allowed for more interactive experiences, including that of the League’s Salary Survey, and automated the Job Ads section to enable members to more quickly post job openings and allow for a more uniform and easier payment system. The overall result was a better look, easier navigation and a better functioning website for members and the public in its interactions with the League.

Other IT improvements during the year included:
- A new phone system with improved call flows to better support of members and operations.
- The transition from VC3 vendor services to staff-led IT support and hosting.
- The implementation of a data warehouse and business analysis – with a first iteration of the new Member360 platform providing an overview of NCLM services used by individual members.

Help When You Need It: NCLM’s Municipal Operations Consultants

Executing on a key League strategic pillar, the year saw the rollout of its field-based Municipal Operations Consultants program, designed to assist cities and towns with financial and operational advice. The program can help municipalities with questions and challenges related to their finances, difficult audit results, management issues or even utility operations, falling in line with Vision 2030 strategic plan goal of expanding the effectiveness and value of League membership services.

Perry James (former chief financial officer for the City of Raleigh), Harold Owen (former manager and current councilman for the City of Burlington), Bob Scott (former manager and finance officer for the Town of Madison) and Ann White (former budget manager for the City of Charlotte) make up the Municipal Operations Consultants (MOCs) team.

In a short time, the group has already worked with dozens of municipalities. “The concept of it being a no-fee service that is included with existing League membership is important,” said White, who worked for the City of Charlotte from 1985 to 2011 and whose MOC territory is in the state’s southeast. “I’ve already gotten one question about how much it was going to cost, with very much pleasantly surprised comments from folks when they realized it was no cost.”

The program comes as cities and towns face growing challenges related to population shifts, demographic changes and evolving operational demands can represent significant tests for municipal budgets and personnel. Municipalities that have been contacted by or are working with the state treasurer’s office on financial issues can particularly benefit from MOC help.

SC
There's a legacy between cops and comic-book heroes.

The Flash's public persona worked in police forensics. Nightwing, AKA Dick Grayson, walked the beat. Dragon was a Chicago cop. Hawkman and Hawkgirl were law enforcement. Renee Montoya of the Batman universe, same. Police officer Jim Harper became the Guardian. The Spectre was a police detective. Judge Dredd was, of sorts, a judge. Lots of varying examples without having to rely on Dick Tracy.

But they're not just confined to comic fiction.

At the Granite Falls Police Department is the very real Sgt. Clint Ferguson, whose uniform blends fiction and reality for a different but effective angle on community policing.

"A lot of people ... the first thing they ask me is, 'Where'd you get your costume?'" the sergeant said, referring not to his police clothing but his Hollywood-caliber Deadpool ensemble, specially made for him by notable designer El Fett out in California.

Deadpool is a wildly popular character from the Marvel Comics universe that Sgt. Ferguson adopted for himself to better connect with youths in Granite Falls, where a little more than 4,700 people live.

Basically, Sgt. Ferguson is the secret identity of the Granite Falls version of Deadpool, and he said it blows kids' minds when they learn it.

The 41-year-old recalled responding...
to a complaint about a group of kids loitering in the town square after-hours. He was in his usual police clothing at the time, probably incidentally giving the impression of a sour authority figure marching in to bust up the kids’ fun.

“They were playing Pokemon Go, I remember,” Sgt. Ferguson said. “And while speaking with them, one of them was on their phone. They were watching something that had to do with comic books. And I showed them a picture of me dressed up as Deadpool. I said, ‘You know who that is?’ And they said, ‘Well, yeah, Deadpool.’ I said, ‘Well, yeah it is -- but it’s me.’ And it just blew their minds…. ‘I can’t believe you’re a cop and you do that.’ And I told them, ‘I’m no different than y’all.’”

It was a powerful idea in a time when law enforcement agencies are looking for ways to overcome negative impressions with civilians, particularly younger people. Today, he goes out as often as he can in his Deadpool suit.

“I was worried they wouldn’t go for it,” the sergeant said when asked how his superiors at the police department processed the idea. But, then again, he had those experiences with kids to back it up. From time to time, Sgt. Ferguson and fellow officers respond to domestic dispute calls with children in the mix. “When I’m in these people’s houses, I’m looking around and there’s just usually comic book heroes everywhere,” he said. “Toys, posters, movies, books. You know, they’re wearing t-shirts with Captain America. And it dawned

with comic books. And I showed them a picture of me dressed up as Deadpool. I said, ‘You know who that is?’ And they said, ‘Well, yeah, Deadpool.’ I said, ‘Well, yeah it is -- but it’s me.’ And it just blew their minds…. ‘I can’t believe you’re a cop and you do that.’ And I told them, ‘I’m no different than y’all.’”

As a kid, I wanted to be a cop when I grew up. And I just got to a point in my life where I was ready to take that step, and I just carried over my interests in the comic book field into that, and I tried to figure out a way that I can work it into my job to reach out here and connect with these kids.

Sgt. Clint Ferguson

“I love to see our officers connecting with the community outside of work,” said Granite Falls Police Chief Chris Jenkins. “It is an opportunity to show others who we are as a person. I want the community to know us in that way.”

For the sergeant, the costume hobby (often called “cosplay”) began when he was a kid. He said his entire annual calendar revolved around Halloween. “I was prepping for Halloween starting November 1,” he said. “I mean, I was always ready for the next Halloween.”

So it’s easy to wonder if the superhero connection influenced his choice of career.

“Every kid dreams of being a hero,” Sgt. Ferguson said when asked about that. “That’s why I think they’re drawn into comic books. Every kid wanted to be Captain America or Spiderman. I don’t know if one influenced the other. I’ve always had a love of both. And I’ve always felt I wanted to be in law enforcement. As a kid, I wanted to be a cop when I grew up. And I just got to a point in my life where I was ready to take that step, and I just carried over my interests in the comic book field into that, and I tried to figure out a way that I can work it into my job to reach out here and connect with these kids.”

It must be said that Deadpool is not historically a G-rated character. But there’s something to that. Teens, for instance, connect with this hero’s rawness, and it might simply be a cooler impression than if his cosplay persona was, say, the Red Bee (an uncelebrated comic book hero from way back when who worked by day as an assistant district attorney and whose crimefighting sidekick was -- no lie -- a pet bee named Michael).

continued on page 43
When Hurricane Florence roared into and then slowly, deliberately plodded through North Carolina, the storm’s damage was indiscriminate.

Among its victims were many of the same local government employees who were out helping rescue other victims from rising flood waters, ensuring that shelters were available, and later helping coordinate recovery efforts.

Recognizing that fact, the North Carolina League of Municipalities Local Leadership Foundation, supported by League staff, stepped in to create the Hometown Care program, providing municipal employees who suffered significant uninsured losses with quick assistance.

Three months later, the Hometown Care program had provided 120 grants totaling $60,000 to municipal employees who became storm victims.

As NCLM Executive Director Paul Meyer noted at the time, the $500 grants were not going to make storm victims whole, but were intended to “be one part of the hometown care they deserve” and show how much they were valued.

For Connie Forand, the Finance Officer for the Town of Topsail Beach, that is exactly how it worked out. Her family farm home, built by her father in 1941, was significantly damaged by Florence. While she and her family continue to try to save the home, the Hometown Care grant provided immediate help in paying for a storage unit for items from the home what were salvageable.

“It is good to know that we are appreciated. I have been in local government for 37 years,” she said. “I work with Topsail Beach and we have seen how people have pulled together to help each other in all of our communities. Sometimes we forget how lives can be changed in a second.”

Those sentiments were seen repeatedly in other comments and communications from those receiving the help.

With Florence serving as the impetus for the creation of Hometown Care, it should be no surprise that there were multiple recipients from some of the most hard-hit communities by the storm. Wilmington, Jacksonville, New Bern, Havelock and Atlantic Beach all had a number of employees who received assistance through the program. In all, 25 municipalities had employees who received the grants during the funding period.

The program was funded with $25,000 from the League, as well as key donations from Cavanaugh Macdonald Consulting, the National League of Cities, the UNC School of Government, Wills Town Watson and Duke Energy. A Gofundme effort raised $9,445.

The League would like to thank all of the donors, as well as the local government coordinators who worked to identify qualifying employees in need of help.

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs
While most public leaders agree that citizens have the right to know what officials and agencies are doing on their behalf, there’s still a reluctance on the part of many to open their records up for public consumption. The fear is that posting too much information may actually muddy the waters, or worse, invite closer unwanted scrutiny. In reality, the opposite is true. New research by the Sunlight Foundation confirms that cities and towns with open data programs actually get fewer record requests from their constituents.

A 2018 multi-city study of the relationship between open data and freedom of Information (FOI) laws found that adopting an open data program significantly decreases the volume of public record requests received by cities — by 30 percent on average — and that this effect grows over time. Additionally, they found that more robust open data programs are associated with greater decreases.

The fact is your government data belongs online where internal and external stakeholders alike can see it. And, the sooner you commit to open data the sooner you can reduce costly, time-consuming record requests.

In addition to saving money and freeing up staff to do other more important public business, you’ll be in a better position to secure constructive feedback, buy-in, and trust from people both inside and outside of your organization.

Companies like ClearGov are already working with communities like yours across the country to help them share their data through unique financial transparency and benchmarking dashboards. ClearGov aggregates and preloads demographic and financial data from various public sources including the U.S. Census, your state treasurer’s office, and more to create easy-to-digest profiles for each community. For more information, please visit https://www.cleargov.com.
In March 2018, hackers infected the City of Atlanta’s computer systems with ransomware.

A ransomware attack involves the use of malicious software to lock a target computer and block the owner’s access until a ransom is paid. The attack, which crippled the city’s ability to do everything from issuing business licenses to collecting traffic fines and utility payments, was apparently prompted by the desire to collect a ransom of $51,000 in Bitcoin.

Although this was a high-profile incident, Atlanta was far from alone.

Roughly a quarter of all municipalities report being targeted by ransomware like that used in the Atlanta attack. The attackers may return as often as once an hour to probe vulnerabilities. Cities from Baltimore to Houston to Leeds, Alabama, have been hacked. The attacks have affected everything from court systems to police departments to hospitals.

Amid this flood of headlines, it is natural for the conscientious municipal official to feel overwhelmed. After all, if the NSA and FBI can be hacked (and they have been), what can a municipality do to protect itself?

The answer: a surprising amount.

First, and foremost, the municipality’s information technology (IT) department needs to ensure that critical systems and software are updated regularly. For all the headlines that conjure visions of sophisticated foreign hackers using cutting-edge techniques, virtually all breaches result from exploiting known vulnerabilities. Software vendors frequently release updates, known as “patches,” to address these vulnerabilities.

But overworked IT staffers are often too busy to download the patches, and sometimes they can be apprehensive about installing patches due to concerns that a patch may adversely affect the system’s existing operations. Nonetheless, IT administrators need to ensure that their software is regularly updated with the latest patches. The highest-profile breaches in recent years,
including Experian, have come from a failure to promptly patch known problems. Second, the weakest link in the security chain is inevitably the human one. The Atlanta attack, for instance, was apparently launched by an employee clicking on a “phishing” link in an e-mail. While human nature makes it impossible to eliminate human error, this kind of vulnerability can be mitigated. Basic cybersecurity training, refreshed by regular reminders, can be an effective and cost-effective way to prepare employees for phishing attacks and similar “social engineering” hacks.

Third, cities must have contingency plans in place to deal with attacks. These involve documenting vulnerabilities, assigning responsibilities and developing backup systems. Like patches, incident response plans need to be updated regularly, especially as threats and technology evolve.

In our practice, we have seen excellent incident response plans that, unfortunately, refer to technology that was phased out years ago. An incident response plan must contain sufficient detail to guide employees in an actual emergency, while retaining the flexibility to enable them to improvise. To this end, cities should run incident response simulations or “table top exercises.” These exercises get key personnel familiar and comfortable with the plan, and they enable them to practice their roles in an actual crisis.

Incident response plans can also help identify gaps in planning or personnel, allowing the municipality to fill those gaps before a real incident occurs.

Fourth, ransomware hackers count on the denial of access to lend an air of urgency to their demands in a crisis. When constituents cannot access key services such as 911, police departments cannot process investigations, and hospitals must re-route trauma patients, pressure mounts for a quick resolution. But the tension can be significantly mitigated by implementing regular backups. Frequently backed up data, ideally retained in a separate location not electronically connected to the main system, can be a lifesaver. Several cities and hospitals have been able to brush off hackers because regular backups offer them an alternative way to keep operations going.

Fifth, every municipality should consider purchasing cyber insurance. Cyber coverage is still economically available even in a time of tight budgets. Cyber insurance offers the insured access to security experts both before and in the event of a crisis. Before a crisis, these experts can evaluate a city’s systems and develop recommendations to mitigate risk.

The advantages of cyber insurance are becoming clear with each successive attack. As with all insurance, it is important that the scope and amount of cyber coverage corresponds to projected risks and needs.

In the final analysis, none of these steps is groundbreaking. They are well-known to seasoned IT professionals, and they have been for years. Yet, far too many busy executives overlook (or under-fund) them in favor of other priorities. That is a mistake.

In cybersecurity, as in life, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Saad Gul is a partner with Poyner Spruill LLP. He advises clients on a wide range of privacy, data security, and cyber liability issues, including risk management plans, regulatory compliance, cloud computing implications, and breach obligations.
North Carolinians Fill Ranks of NLC Leadership

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs

As the National League of Cities begins its advocacy efforts in 2019, its leadership will be well-represented with North Carolina municipal officials and some well-known names associated with the N.C. League of Municipalities. NLCM Executive Director Paul Meyer and Jacksonville City Councilwoman Angelia Washington have been tapped to be on the NLC’s Board of Directors. Both will serve two-year terms on the board. They join Winston-Salem City Council Member and former NCLM Board of Directors Member D.D. Adams on the NLC board, as she was elected to a two-year term last year.

“It is an honor and a privilege to serve on the National League of Cities Board of Directors,” Meyer said. “So many of the challenges faced by cities and towns in North Carolina, caused by huge population shifts in the face of tremendous economic change, are the same challenges faced by so many of our cities across the country. I look forward to being a part of the discussion to help address these challenges.”

In addition to those appointments, 13 elected municipal officials from North Carolina will fill seats on NLC policy committees for 2019. They are seen in the box above:

Meanwhile, NCLM Vice President and Washington Council Member William Pitt has been appointed to two NLC councils, each tasked with engaging more municipal officials in NLC efforts. Pitt will serve on the NLC’s Race, Equity and Leadership Council, as well as its Small Cities Council.

“I am excited and ready to be engaged. We win when we are all at the table,” Pitt said. The National League of Cities advocates for city priorities at the federal level and works to build strong federal local partnerships. NLC President Karen Freeman-Wilson, the mayor of Gary, Indiana, as the new board was announced in November, said that during a time of political division, it is more important than ever for city leaders to work together. “Together we can make real change happen in our communities.”

2019 Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations (FAIR) Committee Roster
Brian Jackson, Councilman, Jacksonville
Timothy Rohr, Council Member, Lenoir

2019 Energy, Environment and Natural Resources (EENR) Committee Roster
(Vice Chair) TJ Cawley, Mayor, Morrisville
Derrick Creech, Council Member District 7, Wilson
Samuel Gaskins, City Council Member, Sanford

2019 Community and Economic Development (CED) Committee Roster
Jason Ewing, Council Member Ward 6, High Point

2019 Human Development (HD) Committee Roster
(Vice Chair) LaWana Mayfield, Council Member, Charlotte
Rose Glover, Mayor Pro Tem District 2, Greenville

2019 Transportation and Infrastructure Services (TIS) Committee Roster
Dan Besse, Council Member Southwest Ward, Winston-Salem
DeDreana Freeman, Council Member, Ward 1 Durham

2019 Public Safety and Crime Prevention (PSCP) Committee Roster
Surluta Anthony, Councilmember, Monroe
Don Hardy, Mayor, Kinston
Quentin Jackson, Councilman, Town of Hertford, NC
Cities of Greensboro, High Point, Hickory Honored at 2018 Housing North Carolina Awards

North Carolina’s top honor for excellence in affordable housing has been awarded to six developments and neighborhoods that provide opportunities for homebuyers, life-changing repairs for homeowners, apartment homes for seniors and families, and permanent supportive housing for adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD).

The City of Greensboro, the City of High Point and the City of Hickory were honored for their contributions to these developments.

Sponsored by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, the 2018 Housing North Carolina Awards recognize properties in Asheville, Asheboro, Raleigh, Greensboro and High Point that serve as models for other communities. In their 29th year, the awards were presented during the NC Affordable Housing Conference last fall, which hosted nearly 1,000 housing industry professionals at the Raleigh Convention Center.

- Building Independence, Raleigh, a permanent supportive housing development for adults with IDD, developed by Habitat for Humanity of Wake County, the Serving Cup and Lutheran Services Carolinas.
- Givens Gerber Park, Asheville, affordable apartment homes for seniors with significant services and close proximity to health care that allows residents to age in place, developed by Opportunities South, LLC, and Givens Estates, Inc.
- Northstone, Hickory, a fully-developed, mixed-income neighborhood of single-family homes developed by Habitat for Humanity of Catawba County and the City of Hickory.
- Ole Asheboro Neighborhood and Southside Neighborhood, Guilford County, a mixture of new homes and rehabilitation of existing homes that expands and preserves affordable housing options for younger buyers and older homeowners, developed by Community Housing Solutions, the City of Greensboro and the City of High Point.
- The Village at Stone Creek, Asheboro, rehabilitated affordable apartment homes for families, developed by Halcon Development and East Point Homes.

The 2018 Housing North Carolina Awards were presented in Raleigh. Photo credit: N.C. Housing Finance Agency
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Here We Grow: Sanford  
*continued from page 5*

hundreds if not thousands of jobs. It will provide endless opportunities for growth and advancement to our entire region,” he says. Leveraging our assets for a greater return long term is something we set out to do as part of our Open for Business Agenda in Sanford, Mann says. “This forward-looking vision of Chatham County and Sanford will deliver a project that will benefit our communities for decades to come.”

Construction is set to begin this year. The megasite is anticipated to be online and ready for major manufacturers looking to build a state-of-the-art production facility by the end of 2019. View the Moncure Megasite’s amenities at https://edpnc.com/megasites/moncure-megasite. SC

Officer in Uniform  
*continued from page 35*

When it’s Sgt. Ferguson in the Deadpool suit, he of course keeps it clean for the integrity and reputation of the Granite Falls PD. And because it works, fellow officers across the U.S. are suiting up similarly, showing up to schools, children’s hospitals and community events as Batman, Captain America or the Hulk among others.

In Fort Worth, Texas, a police officer named Damon Cole has gained attention for his collection of costumes and program of visiting kids, often in hospitals, making them “pinky promise” that they won’t reveal his secret identity. He even once caught a shoplifter while dressed as Batman (and according to KERA News, one of the items the shoplifter tried to make off with was “The LEGO Batman Movie” on DVD).

In Granite Falls, Sgt. Ferguson says he feels fortunate to work for an agency receptive to the unconventional.

“I work for a good town,” he said, “and the agency I work for is really supportive and open to all kinds of ideas.” SC

Speaking Out  
*continued from page 4*

The League and those active in this organization strongly believe that by working as one, we can advance all municipalities — big, small and in between.

So, please be involved. Be engaged. This is your organization. Acting together through it, we can ensure that all North Carolina municipalities collectively thrive and advance. SC

Taking the Field  
*continued from page 44*

working for a better North Carolina.

You will see the League incorporate these values and mission statements into our messaging and materials going forward, just as we will do the same with a new logo and tagline a few short months from now.

We will also use these stated values and mission statements as a springboard to internal culture discussions designed to help make the League the best, most-efficient workplace possible, better connecting staff to how their jobs advance cities and towns as they reflect values such as service and responsiveness.

The result, we believe, will be a League that is ready for any and all challenges ahead. SC
Establishing Values and Mission for the 21st Century

By Paul Meyer
NCLM Executive Director

Back in the fall, I wrote in this column regarding the League's efforts to rebrand the organization with a new logo and associated messaging designed to better reflect who we are today, where we are headed tomorrow, and to better connect to the importance of why we do what we do.

The goal is to unveil that new logo, tagline and an entire new look and feel of the League at CityVision 2019, to be held in Hickory on May 14-16.

But as I noted in that previous column, this effort is about more than a catchy logo or phrase. It is about a larger process of more clearly defining and communicating the values that this League, this association of cities and towns, represents. It is about communicating those values in a way that is clear to all audiences – whether to each other as members, to policymakers, to the media, to the business community or to the larger public. Why is that important? Because our values distinguish us from other organizations; they define how we make decisions; they should reflect our practices.

So, as we engaged with a public relations firm to help rebrand the League, we insisted that this process be member-driven. That firm conducted an extensive survey of members, held individual interviews with municipal officials and others familiar with the League, and held a focus group made up of several members of our Board of Directors.

Those inputs then helped to inform a discussion about external-facing values and a renewed look at the League's mission. But that wasn't all. Two separate workshops with the Board of Directors, a one-day discussion among League managers, and a meeting to gather the thoughts of the larger League staff all helped to inform this conversation around values and mission.

One of the great results that came from these different input points – but one that maybe should not have been surprising – is that the same themes came up time and again.

Those repeated themes, reflecting hallmarks of acknowledged culture, are why we feel confident in the values and mission statements that have been developed.

And so, here they are.

A first-ever values statement of the N.C. League of Municipalities:

Working together as one, the cities and towns of the North Carolina League of Municipalities will be guided by our commitment to:

- **Service**: We trust in the effectiveness of cities and towns, led by locally-elected officials, to pursue their own visions of their futures.
- **Self-determination**: We believe in the ability of all cities and towns to pursue their own visions of their futures.
- **Inclusiveness**: We value every member, the diversity of all, and the diverse nature of each member city and town and their citizenry.
- **Collaboration**: We believe in working together in ways that enhance all cities and towns.
- **Responsiveness**: We focus on the needs of North Carolinians, answering to the people in meaningful ways that affect their everyday lives.

And a new mission statement:

The North Carolina League of Municipalities is a member-driven organization representing the interests of cities and towns in the state. Through their collective efforts, League member cities and towns better serve their residents and improve quality of life.

For more than 100 years, the League has been one voice for cities and towns...
The NC League of Municipalities’ Health Benefits Trust is excited to welcome 42 new employer group members for the 2018-19 plan year!

Since 1984, the Health Benefits Trust has been the only member-owned health insurance pool in North Carolina dedicated to municipal employer group health benefits.

We proudly offer employee benefit solutions for:

- Groups of all sizes, from 1 employee to 1,000+ employees
- Fully-insured plans, HDHPs, self-insured plans, and other fully-customizable options in between
- League members and other local government entities from Murphy to Manteo

Thank you to our members new and old – We’re Here and looking forward to working with you!

www.nclm.org/insurance/health
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Emergencies have a way of popping up when you can least afford them. When they do — and when duct tape will no longer do — we’re here to help.

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