Sylva Mayor
Lynda Sossamon
A Logical Passion
2019 Legislative Session
CityVision 2019 Draws Hundreds to Hickory
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Through the remainder of this year and into 2020, North Carolina municipalities will be engaged in helping assist one of the most important functions affecting their future, the 2020 U.S. Census count.

Officially, the job of counting the U.S. population falls to the U.S. Census Bureau. But individual towns and cities, elected and appointed municipal officials, and community partners have a multitude of reasons to be fully involved in assisting the Census Bureau in getting an accurate count.

For starters, more than 100 federal programs use the data collected during census counts in formulas used to distribute federal tax dollars back out to North Carolina communities. By one estimate, $1,623 in annual federal tax outlays per person in North Carolina rely on the census count. They include programs like Community Development Block Grants, highway planning and construction dollars, Title 1 grants to schools, Medicaid and Medicare Part B.

In turn, some state programs also rely on that same data in how they distribute dollars.

And how that data is used does not stop with federal and state program distributions. It can help determine things like how we plan for natural disasters and proceed with economic development planning. Private sector businesses also use the data as they determine how and where to invest to reach potential customers.

Finally, census counts become critical in our political representation, determining total congressional representation and influencing how districts are drawn. In taking the 2000 Census, North Carolina received an additional congressional seat based on a margin of less than 1,000 residents.

So, that is what is at stake for your city or town. But how can you help to get the count right?

First, it is important to remember that no one has a better understanding of your community than you – the local elected and appointed officials who are already so involved in providing services to residents. You already have contacts with them – through utility services and billings, through community events, through planning and building inspection services, and through your individual efforts to engage with them on a regular basis. No one knows better the community partners – the churches, the charitable and social organizations, and the businesses – that can assist in reaching out to residents to educate them and encourage their participation.

And as online responses will be relied on more than ever, you know the areas where broadband access is limited and could pose challenges. To bridge the digital divide, some local governments plan to set up kiosks at different locations so that residents can complete and submit their responses online.

With that knowledge and those contacts, many cities, towns and counties are forming local Complete Count Committees. If you have not done so, you can reach out to the state Complete Count Commission, with information found at https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/boards-and-commissions/nc-complete-count-commission, or contact your Census Bureau Partnership Specialist, to find the resources to set up your own committee.

But even if you don’t wish to take that step, there are plenty of resources to be found at www.census.gov/2020census, from print materials to social media posts, that you can use to help encourage participation and educate citizens.

With so much on the line, we all need to do our part. **SC**
In Murphy, They Are ‘Calling the Train Home’

In each edition, Southern City will regularly feature one of the local stories uploaded by member municipalities to HereWeGrowNC.org as a part of the League’s campaign promoting investments by cities and towns that aid economic growth. To learn how your local story can be featured, go to HereWeGrowNC.org.

Murphy Mayor Rick Ramsey did not quite know what to expect when he took over from his predecessor, Bill Hughes, in December of 2017. But he was certain reactivating the rail line from Andrews to Murphy, a long-time goal of Hughes’, was nothing more than wishful thinking.

The last train left Murphy for Andrews, a neighboring town about 15 miles east, in 1992. That long period of dormancy will require an estimated $16 million investment for reactivation. However, as an extensive 2015 study revealed, the economic benefits of the project far outweigh the costs.

“I studied the report and I was really surprised by the depth of it and the amount of support it had in our community,” said Mayor Ramsey.

That viewpoint prompted the mayor and town officials to spearhead an event to garner support for the project within the community. They named the event “Calling the Train Home.”

Held last fall, it drew thousands of people to downtown Murphy, and ultimately made its mark in history by shattering a Guinness World Record for largest train whistle gathering. Mayor Ramsey invited Sen. Jim Davis and Rep. Kevin Corbin to speak at the event, allowing the state legislators to see firsthand how strongly the community backed the effort.

Recognizing how beneficial an excursion train is to the local economies of nearby Bryson City along with Blue Ridge, Ga., Murphy officials believe it would be a game changer for their already-vibrant local economy, even though the project could take several years to come to fruition.

In the meantime, the town is building upon that momentum and cohesion to bring more people to downtown. Murphy recently constructed downtown public restrooms, and this fall will construct additional street lights to a busy intersection, with the goal of attracting Atlanta and Chattanooga traffic. The Town is also awaiting a response on their application to participate in the Downtown Associate Community Program, a prerequisite for the renowned Main Street Program.

The efforts coincide with other initiatives undertaken by the Chamber of Commerce and the fairly new Murphy Business Association. The latter group, comprised of downtown merchants, organized Murphy’s second annual “Spring Festival” in May, which was a tremendous success and showcased the best of Murphy for droves of people.

continued on page 43
Sylva Mayor Lynda Sossamon stands outside the high-sitting historic courthouse that overlooks the mountain town. Photo credit: Ben Brown
On the face of it, logic and emotion are at odds. Oil and water. One is all numbers and facts that don’t care if you like them or not; the other gels with moods, the subjectivity of personal experiences, joys, grievances, impatience and so on.

It’s a rare, cool trick to square the two. But that’s the approach Lynda Sossamon is positioned and proud to bring to her role as mayor of the western North Carolina town of Sylva, and has brought to numerous local roles leading up. For her, it’s all about balancing logic and passion to help bring her town sensible but spirited solutions.

“I want things to happen today,” she said with a smile when Southern City asked her to explain. “But I know in government they can’t happen as fast as you want.”

Being interviewed in her mayoral office at Sylva Municipal Hall, Sossamon gestured toward a decades-old painting to her left depicting downtown Sylva business buildings, with neat lines and vibrant colors. Kind of perfect-looking. “This picture was painted when we first started the downtown revitalization,” she said, referring to work that began in the 1990s. While Sylva’s downtown district today is strikingly beautiful, packed with interesting art and color with mountainous surroundings and a knockout hilltop courthouse, some of the buildings are still waiting on that picture-perfect look promised in the painting. Work remains, and gears may turn slowly. “And so,” she said, “I have to look at that and say, it just can’t happen overnight. I have to mix some patience with my passion.”

“Passion” is a go-to word for Sossamon, a longtime resident of Sylva who graduated from close-by Western Carolina College (now University) with a bachelor’s in chemistry and with focuses on math and computer science. “These allow me to make objective, logical, and rational decisions about important matters without letting personal feelings sway my choices,” she says in her social media bio.

Yet, “Passion led me to politics,” she explained to Southern City when asked about her path to elected office, which began in 1997 on the town’s board of commissioners. “Because I’m so passionate about Sylva,” a town of about 2,700 people today.

Sossamon recalled being a business owner downtown in the early 1990s and how everything totally shut down once the clock struck 6 p.m. “There would not be a car downtown,” she said.
By the mid to late 1990s, Sylva had life after 6. People were coming downtown, enjoying the inviting feel of it, and businesses were subsequently more active. Sossamon, taking it all in and proud of her part, thought maybe she could continue making differences and apply methodical approaches as a member of the town’s governing board.

Having been a motivated business owner and chamber of commerce participant, she got well involved in talks of revitalization for new energy. Officials from the N.C. Department of Commerce came to Sylva to observe the scene and offer possibilities and helpful resources at a town meeting. Sossamon said there had to be 80 or 90 people in attendance.

“We got enthused,” she said. “And we created a downtown business group. We raised money, we raised friends and, thankfully, the Town (of Sylva) went along with us.”

Together, they worked with the state’s departments of commerce and transportation on improvements to the scene, eventually with a transformative streetscaping that made downtown more pedestrian friendly, aesthetically sharp and neater for cars. From there, the town applied to the Main Street Program and, in 1995, became the smallest North Carolina town at the time to be designated a Main Street community.

(In 2018, the North Carolina chapter of the American Planning Association named Sylva its “Great Main Street” award winner.)
“It wasn’t for politics,” she reminded. “It was for love of Sylva. That’s when I ran first and was elected to a four-year term.”

Defeated in her initial re-election, Sossamon remained involved in downtown business and broader civic service, including a period as chair of the water and sewer board. Eyeing the town commission seat again, she made another run that restored her in 2012. She was mayor by 2015.

Fast-forward, Sylva is a vibrant community, with multiple craft breweries, independent retailers and restaurants, pumping with traffic and growing its own attractive brand of mountain living -- looking good for a town of less than 3,000 residents.

Sylva has become such a popular spot that the local government’s current top challenge is automobile traffic, with a highway running right through, connecting the town to Western Carolina University, just a 10-minute drive away. Sylva’s part of the highway hasn’t been expanded in a long time, and the town is working with the Department of...
Transportation toward a widening. “It has to get done,” Sossamon said. Currently, it’s expected to begin construction in 2023.

While the attraction of industry to available land is the focus for so many communities, Sossamon and fellow officials see a more long-game, logical use of Sylva’s sites. That’s in conservation, making sure the majestic natural scene is preserved for generations ahead. Efforts are underway to save a big piece of land from development, in part as outdoor recreation and appreciation grows to lifestyle levels in and around Sylva. Sossamon and others in government there recognize that natural-attraction value to prospective residents, and to tourists.

“Most of the people who move here move here because of the way it looks,” she said. “They love the mountains here. And they like to have outdoor things to do. That’s something we’re trying to attract.

“But,” she continued, “that brings us to one of my main concerns that we have -- broadband.”

While Sylva has limited development space, Sossamon knows that attracting a 3,000-job industrial employer within the corporate boundaries is not in the cards. But with residential growth possible, Sossamon also knows that superfast internet service for the people of Sylva could easily enable modern, work-from-home potential.

“Those are the people we could attract,” she said, adding it would also tremendously help the area’s children who need better internet options to keep up with online school work.

It all adds up.

In improving downtown (which, again, already gives a striking first impression), Sossamon would like to see all buildings eventually locally owned, with non-absentee landlords keeping up appearances. “I just think it makes people realize that if you can get businesses owned by local people, it gives them pride in the downtown and pride in the buildings,” the mayor said.

Arts and color are clearly part of the texture for Sylva’s creative, mountain vibe, which is another piece to foster, Sossamon continued, noting public art and murals have been great for downtown’s impression.

In 2016, the main street became a filming location for the Academy Award-winning “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri,” which has brought all the more prominence and sight-seeing value to the town, which visitors are acting on. To Sossamon, it was notable that Sylva could stand in as the fictional Missouri town, as Missouri itself was lacking any film incentive.

“It was such a neat thing to see them starting filming here,” said the mayor (who appeared as an extra in the film).

Also a breast cancer survivor, Sossamon’s triumphs, assists and experiences are too numerous to encapsulate fully on these pages. But reaching back to the 1990s and the seeds of Sossamon’s practical civic interest, she has a lot to be proud of.

And while they may take time and patience, more improvements are in Sossamon’s sights, which she plans to see through with a balance of teamwork, logical pacing and, yes, that last, important ingredient.

“It’s my passion,” she said. SC
CityVision 2019 Draws Hundreds to Hickory

League’s Annual Conference Focused on Practical Solutions to Local Issues

By Ben Brown, NCLM Communications and Multimedia Strategist

Two full days. Hundreds of municipal leaders. Thought-provoking keynotes. Displays and demonstrations. Tools to face today’s hometown challenges head-on. CityVision 2019, the League’s annual conference held May 14-16 in host-city Hickory, was a memorable success with new features that added immediate, practical value for any municipality in attendance.

“Today, for the League, it’s about bettering the lives of North Carolinians by making cities and towns more responsive, stronger, more resilient, helping them reflect unique and local visions,” Jacksonville Mayor Pro Tem and Immediate Past President of the League Michael Lazzara said during podium remarks. Lazzara served an extended tenure as League president leading up to CityVision 2019. “We are working as one, and advancing all,” Lazzara said.

“Working as One. Advancing All.” was not just a one-off phrase for the conference; it’s the League’s new tagline, paired with a freshly updated logo, under a major rebranding unveiled to members at the two-day event.

The main portions of the conference began bright and early May 15 at the Hickory Metro Convention Center, abuzz with mayors, councilmembers, commissioners, alderpersons, law enforcement officials and municipal staffers. All had access to concurrent and general sessions of their choice with focuses on future-readying, strengthening bonds with residents, communicating success stories on the ground, broadband as 21st century infrastructure, and more.

State Attorney General Josh Stein spoke on the urgency of the opioid-abuse crisis, a major focal point of his office, and discussed the League’s Opioid Solutions Toolbox, found at nclm.org/opioidsolutions, providing local leaders important tools for combating the issue.

Futurist Matt Thornhill led sessions focused on the context of growth, generational change and disruptive technologies that are shifting how we interface with our communities. Ted Lord, acting president of Golden LEAF, connected League members with crucial information on securing

Motivational speaker Jeff Evans was among many, acclaimed special guests at CityVision in Hickory. Photo credit: Cindy Burnham for NCLM
grants. Brian Hooker, executive director of Fort Mac LRA, wowed the crowd with his presentation on a large-scale redevelopment project on an old Army post in underserved southwest Atlanta. And motivational speaker Jeff Evans inspired with stories of globetrotting adventures and mountain-climbing, with lessons on teamwork and leadership.

The City of Hickory, CityVision’s host this time around, planned numerous ways for conference-goers to absorb their community, which has undergone and continues to undergo the kind of revitalization that creates a thriving, resident-proud sense of place. During a downtown host-city event added to the conference programming, League members enjoyed the results with plenty of foot traffic to local shops and restaurants while seeing construction work in progress on further improvements.

Every installment of CityVision is meaningful. This time, especially so. Originally scheduled for September 2018 in Hickory, CityVision went on hold in light of the devastation of Hurricane Florence, the uncommonly powerful storm that churned over the state at the time and left so many communities with more urgent priorities. In turn, the League’s Board of Directors and executive staff made the difficult call to reschedule the conference for spring 2019 -- incidentally starting a new schedule for the event typically held each fall.

We are so thankful that the City of Hickory graciously welcomed us back, and that there was availability at the Hickory Metro Convention Center to accommodate our group. We look forward to seeing everyone next spring at CityVision 2020, with Wilmington as our host city. It’s scheduled for May 5-7, 2020. Save the date! SC
SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars! Join us in Wilmington for CityVision 2020!

MAY 5-7, 2020
Wilmington Convention Center
The 2019 legislative session began in January with a new dynamic in play: Both the state House and Senate had lost their veto-proof majorities, while down the street a governor of the opposite party held sway at that State Capitol. Six months later, as the session came to something of conclusion, the dramatic effects of that change were on full display.

Gov. Roy Cooper had vetoed a budget bill, and Republican legislative leaders were struggling to find enough Democratic votes to override that veto. With the governor pushing for Medicaid expansion and GOP leaders balking at that proposal, the result was a budget impasse, with major implications for both partisan and bipartisan funding priorities. (As of this writing, the General Assembly was preparing to conclude almost all non-budget business and either adjourn until late August or begin so-called skeleton sessions that meet technical requirements to continue the session while not conducting daily business.)

The new dynamic also had the effect of somewhat slowing the overall passage of legislation. As of this writing, the General Assembly had passed 181 new laws. In the previous “long” session of 2017, that number was 214. Nonetheless, NCLM still tracked some 335 bills that had implications for cities and towns, with 81 of those deemed to be of critical or high importance.

Taking all of this into consideration, the results of this session – assuming those bipartisan funding priorities eventually become law – could prove very good for North Carolina cities and towns. League of Municipalities staff and member elected and appointed officials worked to gain approval of several key legislative priorities and fashion several compromises that blunted or eliminated harmful effects for cities and towns. Several bills that would have infringed on local control and limited the ability of residents to shape communities based on their own visions were stopped.

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Political Communication and Coordination

Above left: Former lawmaker Gary Pendleton talks with Reps. Pat Hurley (center) and Marvin Lucas at a legislative committee meeting. Upper right: The mall walk outside the state Legislative Building on Jones Street in Raleigh. Lower right: NCLM Executive Director Paul Meyer addresses a legislative committee during the 2019 session. Photo credits: Ben Brown
On the budget front, the bill agreed to by the state House and Senate would extend the Historic Preservation Tax Credit program, which was scheduled to expire at the end of the year, for four more years. The budget plan would also make changes to the state’s film grant program to make more projects eligible for the grants.

Transportation-related city priorities were also included in the budget, with Powell Bill funding maintained in the first year of the two-year plan, while rising by about 5 percent in the second year (though the increase would not extend to municipalities above 200,000.) Increases in the Strategic Transportation Investments Program (STIP) and State Maintenance Assistance Program (SMAP) would also benefit cities and towns.

Putting $94.1 million more toward the Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Fund and redirecting another $17 million there will also benefit communities recovering from the devastating storms last fall. Meanwhile, the creation of a Viable Utility Reserve, with an initial appropriation of $9 million in recurring money, represents a substantial step in the ongoing conversation about how to address struggling rural water and sewer systems.

Finally, the budget plan contains $37.7 million for specific projects in 116 municipalities.

Outside of the budget, a number of pieces of legislation made incremental changes in the Local Government Employees Retirement System in keeping with a League goal of supporting the fiscal integrity of the system. Legislation that would have created a new post-employment benefit for firefighters -- at significant cost to municipalities and outside of the pension system -- was turned into a study at the urging of the League, a move that also met a key goal approved by League members back in November 2018.

Another defensive win for NCLM came when bills calling for privatization of the ABC system and consolidation of local boards were culled into very modest reforms related to sales and discouraging the creation of new ABC boards. And League lobbyists helped lead the fight to stop a bill that would have preempted ordinances regulating home short-term rentals through companies like Airbnb and another preempting tree ordinances.

Another bill that would have decriminalized local ordinances was also largely turned into a legislative study.

Those fights should sound familiar, as we have seen similar ones play out in recent years, and League staff and members have rallied to stop harmful legislation in the past.

League of Municipalities staff and member elected and appointed officials worked to gain approval of several key legislative priorities and fashion several compromises that blunted or eliminated harmful effects for cities and towns. Several bills that would have infringed on local control and limited the ability of residents to shape communities based on their own visions were stopped.
What has changed from past sessions, though, is how much more effective League staff has become in working with industry to negotiate helpful changes in bills that were likely to become law with or without those changes. That change is largely due to better political influence and capital created through the help of all of our members – big, small and in between.

Those negotiations occurred in compromises reached with the N.C. Home Builders Association and N.C. Bar Association regarding substantial changes in land-use law, and with the Home Builders Association again regarding performance guarantees. As a result of the changes negotiated in the larger land-use bill, cities did not lose flexibility regarding how they address surrounding property owner concerns when working with developers on large mixed-use developments.

The League also negotiated with the Outdoor Advertising Association on legislation related to the relocation of billboards when the structures are condemned due to new construction, ensuring that the legislation limited the movement and did go beyond that specific purpose.

One of the big to-dos on the League’s list of legislative priorities is still before us – gaining passage of legislation to better enable broadband-related public private partnerships. Legislation was filed in the House, with more than 70 co-sponsors, but major telecommunications firms remained opposed to the bill even as NCLM and the N.C. Association of County Commissioners worked with bill sponsors throughout the session to try to alleviate concerns. The bill remains eligible for consideration in 2020. Meanwhile, legislation was approved allowing electric co-ops to engage in partnership with internet providers to bring better service to rural areas of the state.

The 2019 legislative session continued a trend that saw the League and its members increasingly engaged with legislators and other advocacy organizations in shaping policy agendas and specific legislation. By many measures, it was an extremely successful session for cities and towns, and one that showed NCLM is positioned well with its lobbying, grassroots and policy communications efforts.

You can read more about the 2019 legislative session in this year’s End of Session Bulletin, which can be found at www.nclm.org/advocacy/league-bulletin. SC
The litigation risks facing all municipalities are substantial, ever-changing and constantly on the mind of human resources managers throughout the state. Still, hidden beneath a stream of new case law, those legal pitfalls may be hard to find.

The North Carolina League of Municipalities is aiming to clear the confusion with a traveling education series as part of its enhanced HR training program. The event, titled Employment Law and Best Practices for Human Resources Professionals, will serve as an evolving forum for experts to keep member cities and towns apprised of the most recent case law affecting municipality HR.

“I think that it’s much more complicated than it ever has been before,” said Heather James, HR Consultant for the League. “There’s a lot more money at stake for towns. These trainings are going to give them the information to make better decisions.”

The current iteration of the program covers three key areas: First Amendment retaliation, name-clearing hearings, and employee leave as it relates to the ADA and FMLA. Attorneys from Cranfill, Sumner and Hartzog deliver the most up-to-date employment law with clarity and expertise, and are available for questions relating both broadly to the state and specifically to the guest’s municipality.

The program supplements the League’s continuously available HR consulting.

“Everything changes so fast and changes so often that six months from now, you’re not sure exactly where you stand,” said Charles Baisey, Town Administrator for Scotland Neck. “We don’t do anything without calling the League first. These events are a great benefit to us, to help us through these processes without making a mistake.”

It’s not an area to be taken lightly, according to attorney Dan Hartzog Jr., as the liability risks for municipalities have only increased following recent cases Tully v. City of Wilmington and Cannon v. Village of Bald Head Island. Decided within the past year, those cases have altered the framework around once-ordinary procedures, such as employee terminations, and have introduced constitutional questions involving free speech, liberty interests and due process.

“Knowing that this stuff is out there is half the battle,” Hartzog said. “It’s becoming more common that these types of cases are being brought. It’s important that everyone remains aware of these types of issues.”

Thus far held in Garner, Leland, and Hickory, the event has been a high demand, filling up quickly with managers, administrators, sheriffs and HR staff at each location. James expects future sessions to be even more sought-after.

“Local governments are hungry for this information,” said James. “They want to do the right thing.”

Law enforcement is one of the many municipal groups that the enhanced HR training program aims to benefit. Photo credit: Shutterstock

By Jack Cassidy, NCLM Communications Associate
We’re Here for Law Enforcement

Pool members have access to:
• Law Enforcement Risk Review
• Defensive Driver Training
• Advanced Use of Force Training & Simulator
• Body Armor Grants
• Dangerous Crossroads Ahead Course (1st & 4th Amendment Rights)
Southern City 3RD QUARTER 2019 21

The summer is a busy time at the League, especially for our Risk Management Services department. Our team of underwriters, field services staff, and Business Development and Membership field consultants work together to explain insurance renewal information, answer questions about coverage options and value-added programming, and work with members to develop programs to control risk exposures.

This year, we fielded a lot of questions about the impact of the hurricanes on the pools – specifically the Property and Casualty Trust – in the aftermath of 2018’s hurricane season, which brought Hurricanes Florence and Michael to the state in a back-to-back wallop that affected so many of our members. While those storms caused much damage, from which our communities are still recovering, I’m proud to tell you unequivocally that our pools remain strong and at the ready to continue serving our members.

Beginning in the 1980s, the League began establishing self-funded insurance pools to help members and other local government entities meet their insurance needs. When private insurers failed to fill the gap, the League stepped in, and ever since we’ve been here for those pool members while other companies come and go. In 1986, the self-funded Property and Casualty Trust was created. It is member-governed and overseen by the Risk Management Board of Trustees, composed of 11 municipal officials from across the state. We currently have 400 members in the Property and Casualty Trust.

The Property and Casualty Trust is in excellent financial health, and we remain committed to helping our members protect their assets. As the only insurer dedicated solely to insuring North Carolina’s municipal government and run by its members for its members, we are unmatched in underwriting North Carolina municipal risks.

We maintain certain controls to ensure that the association and our insurance pools remain a constant, financially sound resource for our members, and we work hard to be stable. For example, an independent auditing firm reviews the League’s records, including insurance, on a biennial basis. Also, an independent actuarial firm reviews our insurance pools, including losses, every year and helps us develop rates that keep us solvent. To further protect our members financially, the Property and Casualty Trust is reinsured with other commercial carriers, and our reinsurance limits are much more conservative than commercial carriers.

All of this to say, you can be assured that the League’s insurance pools are well protected against routine losses and 100-year storms alike. Arguably, the League provides more stability than national commercial carriers, as we are not at risk for huge losses from disasters and claims affecting other states – we write North Carolina municipal risk only.

In addition to our stability, members can rely on the exceptional customer service and value-added programs that we provide. At the direction of the Board of Trustees, we offer safety grants to our pool members. We also prioritize risk management programming like online training modules and one-on-one training and assessments with our staff, including a suite of Shield Services dedicated to our member law enforcement agencies. These are not “à la carte” offerings for additional service fees – they are free to members, and we strongly encourage you and your employees to take advantage of them. If your organization has questions about the Property and Casualty Trust, or any of our pools, we have a staff full of experts to help you. We appreciate your membership and are here for you.  SC
With immensely strong pools, exceedingly competitive costs and plans geared specifically toward municipalities, insurance from the North Carolina League of Municipalities’ is nearly always the most attractive coverage option for cities and towns.

And that’s only at the most basic level.

Within each enrollment in the Workers’ Compensation Trust or Property and Casualty Trust is a breadth of additional offerings, from online courses to traveling educational seminars to on-call consultants, all included in the coverage for no extra cost.

“The work we do out in the field, and the people we have readily available to help municipalities at a moment’s notice—other carriers do not have that,” said Michael Pittman, Director of Underwriting. “We have people doing one-on-one meetings with police chiefs, consultants traveling the state informing members about employment practices.

“There are just so many offerings,” Pittman said. “Every one of our members should be taking advantage of these.”

Online, the League provides training sessions on more than 100 topics that directly impact municipal operations, from law enforcement to utilities. Whether a municipality needs its line workers to be trained on workplace safety or its HR staff to learn about employment liability, the online portal has it covered.

More hands-on guidance is provided in person. League consultants hold a number of educational sessions throughout the state, and can be scheduled for on-site risk assessment and consultation. Additionally, the League provides coverage against cyber-attacks, training services geared toward law enforcement, and a number of newsletters and bulletins, which share the most up-to-date risk management information.

“The League’s responses to issues, claims, assessments to mitigate risks, and general help with our Property and Liability coverage and Worker’s Compensation coverage has been very beneficial,” said Ed Evans, Town Manager for North Wilkesboro. “I have great confidence in the League staff and have called upon them often to help provide professional insight and answers to some tough questions.”

And, as with all League services, the main benefit continues to be its member-driven mission, which underlies all services. There are no generalities. From the people to the plan, the offerings are designed specifically with municipalities in mind, ensuring that the League is uniquely equipped to attend to the needs of towns and cities.

Moreover, the insurance pools are self-funded and member-governed by a Board of Trustees composed of municipal officials, meaning that the coverage is not simply beholden only to North Carolina cities and towns—it’s managed by them, too.

“They are a ready help when needed, and we certainly share more than a mere contractual relationship on insurance,” said Evans. “I think of the NCLM staff as an extension of our own town staff.”

NCLM INSURANCE
Covering All the Bases

By Jack Cassidy, NCLM Communications Associate

SC
### 2018 at a Glance

**1:1 Meetings & Consultations**

17 risk management, grassroots and/or operations consultants met with 400+ members for more than 1,000 in-person consultations, including onsite hazard reviews, 170 HR/Employment Liability consultations, 69 Law Enforcement Risk Review requests in process, and more.

**Workers’ Comp**

- 464 local government entities insured
- 23,648 municipal employees covered, including 4,537 police officers
- 2,228 new claims received

**Business & Membership Development**

- 147 periodic publications/broadcasts annually with a total distribution of 450,000+
- Totally revamped website that is mobile ready, ADA compliant and more modern.
- We saw more than 85,000 user sessions on the website over the course of the year.

**Health Benefits Trust**

- 17,263 covered lives across group health and voluntary benefits, including medical, vision, dental, short- and long-term disability, and basic life insurance.

**Advocacy & Legal Assistance**

- 112 bills tracked, including 69 high-level or critical issues
- 5 advocacy goals achieved
- Filed an amicus brief in one legal case and provided technical help with 10 other cases. Participated in six moot court cases.

**Media & Publications**

- 5,446 followers; 86,000+ impressions
- 2,938 followers; 2,000+ likes

**Events & Education**

- 2,316 municipal officials attended 24 live trainings and networking events
- 13,000 municipal employees attended online risk management courses

**Debt Setoff**

- $4,547,293 collected by the Debt Setoff Program in debts owed to 291 municipal participants in FY17-18.
- $71,616,106 total collected since 2002.

**Grant Funding**

- $142,000 in Wellness Grants to 48 projects
- $85,000+ for body armor vests distributed to police departments

**Property & Casualty**

- 403 local government entities insured
- 15,197 vehicles insured
- 15,586 structures insured
- 2,861 claims handled
You’ve already read the ubiquitous (and sometimes even trite) articles about the scarcity of youth in public leadership. There are entire conference sessions, even books, dedicated to what 20-somethings supposedly want, and how recruiters for local government jobs or campaigns can flex that knowledge to diversify their bases of talent and perspective.

While they work on it, it’s worth studying what hooked Rep. Derwin Montgomery of Winston-Salem, a soon-to-be 31-year-old with a decade of experience as an elected official. And it’s something that usually works with any age: fire and influence. You see something you think needs changing, and you explore the relationships and channels that might lead there. Representative Montgomery – underway with his

‘A Great Civics Lesson’

Rep. Derwin Montgomery on taking initiative for a better community

By Ben Brown and Jack Cassidy, NCLM Communications
first full session as a state legislator, as of this writing – spent time with Southern City in discussion of who and what impressed him as a young man, and how that developed into a sense of civic initiative, from community organizing to later becoming the youngest city council member anyone in North Carolina knew of at the time.

**SC:** First, remind us when you arrived at the N.C. General Assembly.

**DM:** I got appointed at the end of August 2018 (filling a vacancy left by retirement of Rep. Ed Hanes). I was actually seated in November 2018. You may recall there were a few special sessions at the end of last year. I came in and was seated during the final special session of 2018.

**So was it jumping in the fire at that point?**

Very much so… I was sworn in after a city council meeting the day before Election Day. So, coming in to that special session, the agenda of the General Assembly at that time was to take on the constitutional amendments, particularly the constitutional amendment around voter ID, which was the number one priority during the special session at that time. So it was jumping head first into the fire, especially after transitioning from a city council that didn’t have a bunch of political debates, and that more so was able to focus on policy.

**Tell us more about that transition, from city council to a statewide body.**

So, eight folks making the decision on the city council; 120 on the House side and then another 50 on the other side of the hall. The unfortunate thing, nationally and on the state level, is we are divided very much on political lines. That’s not the same case that I see in local government. Yes, you have folks from different parties, but at the end of the day you just have to get stuff done. At the state level, although I expected it, that’s probably been the biggest thing for me, is just looking at the fact of how much partisanship is playing a role in what happens and what doesn’t happen. Regardless of whether it’s a good idea or not, partisanship has a big, big, big role in what’s taken up and how we proceed here. I am a member of the minority party. Even though I have great ideas, there is a different way that you have to maneuver through the process as a member of the minority party to figure out how to still get that idea heard and push that policy forward. That doesn’t mean it’s impossible. It just takes more work. (But) many people have talked about the fact that there’s a lot more openness to conversation this session than there has been in the past. Pleasantly surprised that the dialogue is there.

**What got you interested in the state level of government, versus staying on city council?**

For almost 10 years serving on the city council, one thing that has become extremely clear … is how impactful state government has been and continues to be on local issues. I’m one that I believe local communities should be able to make rules and policies that make sense for them. Over the years, there’s been a carving away at local authority and local abilities to just do what they believe is in the best interest of their communities and the electorate that puts them in office to decide that. So that was a big driving force for me, in terms of...
looking at the state. But also, on the
city council, for us, we're restricted
just on things that are happening
in the city. Economic development
opportunities. One of the big things
for me was, and continues to be is,
affordable housing.... But we haven’t
touched anything around health care
and education and those things that,
when you look at the dynamics of
neighborhoods and communities and
the challenges of neighborhoods and
communities that you see firsthand
as a city council person, you begin
to see that these aren’t singular
issues. They’re a collective group of
issues. You can’t just chip away at
one of them. You have to look at the
overarching issues and attack them at
the same time. And so being able to
come to the state legislature affords
the opportunity to not just focus on
the economic development side, not
just focus on affordable housing,
health care, the education, but be
able to deal with them holistically and
see how that has an impact on the
ground for everyday people.

So what got you into local office to
begin with?
I was a political science major in
undergrad. Came to Winston-Salem
State University for undergrad. I
always knew I would be engaged
in public policy in some fashion.
Whether it was on the elected side
was always up for question.... but I
knew I wanted to be in a place of
advocacy and policymaking. And
so Winston-Salem State, like many
HBCUs (historically black colleges
and universities) across the country
and across North Carolina, reside in
challenged communities, particularly
because they are predominantly
African-American neighborhoods
and communities that, over time
after segregation and moving into
desegregation, you saw dynamic
shifts in neighborhoods and
communities.... They call it the “brain
drain,” where the more affluent
individuals have the opportunity
to leave the community and go
other places. So you have existing
challenges that continue to grow.
And so around the campus of
Winston-Salem State, I saw dramatic
differences from what I experienced
on campus. If I walked one block off
the university campus, the fact that
we couldn’t go grocery shopping
for household goods. You couldn’t
go to a sit-down restaurant walking
right off of the campus. And so, for
me, if I got in my car and drove to
the other side of the city -- not that
far; two or three miles away -- the
dynamics were quite different. For
me, I wanted to be a part of changing
that, changing the dynamics in
the community. Because if that’s
what we experienced as students,
the neighbors in the community
struggled with the exact same
thing. And that was a big motivating
factor for me in terms of how do we
change what we are seeing in our
communities. The disinvestment
that has happened over generations.
We need to shift what we're doing
and help people believe in our
communities. We had a lot of great
successes over the last 10 years.

Before elected office, can you recall
the first impactful thing you did or
were a part of? Something that got
you motivated to do more?
My dad is a lifelong educator. He
retired a principal and a pastor. My
mom ran a bookstore at the college
at Columbia, South Carolina. Every
year, growing up right outside of Columbia, we would go downtown for King Day at the Dome. We participated in the marches in that timeframe. It was all tailored towards dealing with, one, recognizing King Day, but a big part of that was dealing with the fact that, in South Carolina, on the top of the state capitol resided the Confederate flag. I remember going to that and hearing the speakers speak and having a conversation with my parents on the need for people to be in places where they see things that are not right (and) needed to do something about it. There are times and there are moments when individuals and communities might not always have the right words or the right ability to articulate what’s happening, and it requires lawmakers or just community activists or individuals engaging, to advocate on their behalf. That was something that was kind of stirred up in me, so when I got to Winston-Salem State and was going through how I was engaging off-campus and on-campus, I got engaged with two groups -- one was the NAACP chapter on campus. I went on to be the chapter president two years. And I became first vice president for the State Youth and College Division at the NAACP, again getting me really engaged in advocacy work... But what got me to Winston-Salem, particularly, was while I was engaged in that NAACP work, I did an internship with the Center for Community Change out of Washington, D.C., and they placed me back in Winston-Salem (with a community organizing group). And for several months, my job was doing community organizing and engaging with neighbors. This time it was around the school board. There was a big push for moving to a nonpartisan school board (from a then-partisan makeup) in the city. We worked, knocked on doors, talked to individuals, helping them understand the issue. That gave me another look and feel of a city that I didn’t grow up in, a city and a community that I didn’t understand all the challenges and problems that were happening. But that experience made me fall in love with Winston-Salem, because it made me realize that we could actually make a difference. Because we got the petitions completed, and we were able to get our legislators together, and we moved forward with being able to transition the partisan school board to a nonpartisan school board. And I said, “Hey, I think I like this thing. You can actually do something, you can get people together ... you can actually make a difference.” (The board returned to partisan elections under later changes) but it showed what happened when you galvanized a community and got them behind an idea, and helped push that forward.

You were 21 when you were elected to city council. How was that perceived?
I ran for Student Government Association president on campus.
That summer, after I lost that race, I did an internship in the mayor's office. And doing that internship is where I started to really look at the city council work, how it really impacted the challenges going on in the community. City council members impact us a great deal. So that's what motivated me to run. I was 20 when I filed to run, and I remember walking into the board of elections to file my paperwork and the woman at the counter – I gave her my ID and all the information – had to get the director of the board of elections to go and check to make sure I could actually file to run. The charter requires that you must be 21 to be a city council member. And so the decision was made there that as long as I would be 21 by the date of the election, I could run. I ran against a 16-year incumbent .... It was less about me running against her and more about me running for the community that I thought the East Ward could be. To this day, I have respect (for that incumbent) and the work she did, because I think we all build on one another. But the newspapers and others said, about this college kid who was running, “This will be a great civics lesson for him. He'll learn how to take the theory out of the classroom and put it into practice. He won't win but he'll have a good lesson.” We ran a race that engaged new people in the electorate. I knew that I didn’t grow up in the neighborhoods, didn’t grow up in that community.... My goal was to turn out as many students as possible, as well as built on the existing relationships I had built in the community. We turned out more new voters from the campus in that election than we had done the year before in the presidential election, in terms of the net new registrants. That's what swept me into office.

Do you keep a focus on getting new, young people involved?

Very much so. I’m a part of the YEO Network -- the Young Elected Official Network. And so what that has done is connected me and many of the young elected officials in North Carolina to this national network. How do we continue to develop the next
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safeguard taxpayer money, keep the amount of their deposit in the community to support local lending, and eliminate the burden of ongoing collateral tracking.

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Over the course of the past year, the North Carolina League of Municipalities has revved up its services aimed at helping member cities and towns with their employment practices and questions. We wanted to build upon the popularity and momentum of the League’s existing Law Enforcement Risk Review program and create a similar model for our members’ clerks and human resources officers. As a former human resources director and town clerk for the Town of Davidson, I know the struggle that many member communities can face when it comes to employment liability. Tasked with dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s of a town’s everyday business, they often must navigate employment issues, which can quickly veer into legal matters and liability issues.

Employment liability can potentially cause a lot of harm to cities and towns. Not only can an employment misstep cost a municipality money, it can also serve as fodder for mistrust and tension between staff, elected officials and the public. That’s why the League has created the Employment Practices Liability Legal Mitigation Program – a program that allows members of the Property and Casualty Trust to receive up to five hours of free legal advice for human resources related issues. The goal of this service is to mitigate costly employment practice claims before a lawsuit is filed.

However, this program is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to our employment consulting services. In addition to fielding questions from our members, my colleague Hartwell Wright and I are also working with a Human Resources Advisory Committee to help direct our efforts. This committee encompasses a diverse group of municipal staff, who are responsible for their city or town’s human resources management. They have the expertise to determine how to best address the issues facing our members, and will develop best practices, risk analysis, sample policies, and the training needed to achieve our goals.

One such training is our recent Employment Law and Best Practices for Human Resources Professionals sessions held in June and July. Initially, we thought the class would host a few managers, clerks and human resources directors, but we were thrilled when the course filled up and we needed to add additional locations. The trainings covered recent employment law case rulings, federal employment laws like the Family Medical Leave Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, and even First Amendment issues related to employees. The trainings were taught by attorneys from Cranfill, Sumner and Hartzog in partnership with the League.

As the world of human resources evolves, we will continue to assist members and provide programming that keeps you up-to-date with the latest court decisions, trends and best practices. In the meantime, please don’t hesitate to ask us anything related to human resources. We are here to help, and no inquiry is too small.

“Employment liability can potentially cause a lot of harm to cities and towns... That’s why the League has created the Employment Practices Liability Legal Mitigation Program – a program that allows members of the Property and Casualty Trust to receive up to five hours of free legal advice for human resources related issues.”
Among top highlights at CityVision 2019, the League’s annual conference held this year in Hickory, was the installation of a new League president and Board of Directors, with Washington City Council Member William Pitt in the center role, chosen by representatives from cities and towns across North Carolina.

Pitt will lead the League as its president over the next year, with Cary Council Member Jennifer Robinson the organization’s first vice president and Salisbury Council Member Karen Alexander as second vice president.

Pitt has served on the Washington City Council since 2009. He has a long history of involvement in League activities, including serving on NCLM policy committees and the Board of Directors. Pitt urged his fellow municipal officials to take advantage of the opportunities working through an organization like the League offers, as it focuses on the common purpose and goals of North Carolina cities and towns. “Let’s make it our goal to listen, to engage and leave our communities better than we found them. Whether serving on legislative policy committees, speaking at the General Assembly, or sharing the value of cities and towns and what we bring to the table, we have that opportunity with the League,” Pitt said.

Pitt replaces outgoing president Michael Lazzara, Mayor Pro Tem of Jacksonville. League Executive Director Paul Meyer praised Lazzara’s dedication, noting how he served during a challenging but successful time in the League’s history. Those challenges included League staff being displaced by the downtown Raleigh fire in 2017 and the postponement of CityVision in 2018 due to Hurricane Florence.
and the many difficulties that storm posed for cities and towns, including Lazzara’s. “Despite all of that, the League continued to evolve into a mission-focused organization, and Michael’s service was a huge part of that,” Meyer said. “His dedication in assisting in efforts on addressing the opioid crisis and broadband access were remarkable. He has been integral in terms of continuing to address structural changes in our organization and better positioning the League politically.” Meyer said he looked forward to continuing those trends under the leadership of Pitt, Robinson and Alexander.

The following other officials were installed on the League Board of Directors (some continuing existing terms):

League District 1,
Mayor Don Kingston, Duck
League District 2,
Mayor Dennis Barber, Newport
League District 3,
Mayor Walter Eccard, Shallotte
League District 4,
Mayor Gloristine Brown, Bethel
League District 5,
Mayor Pro Tem Carl Ferebee, Roanoke Rapids
League District 6, Commissioner William Harris, Fuquay-Varina
League District 7,
Mayor Lewis Weatherspoon, Angier
League District 8,
Mayor Bobby Kilgore, Monroe
League District 9,
Mayor Neville Hall, Eden
League District 10,
Mayor Pro Tem Ben Willis, Lenoir
League District 11,
Mayor Scott Neisler, Kings Mountain
League District 12,
Mayor Lynda Sossamon, Sylva
At Large, Council Member Jennifer Parsley, Concord

At Large,
Mayor Ian Baltutis, Burlington
At Large,
Council Member Owen Thomas, Lumberton
Manager, Jeffrey Repp,
City Manager, Boiling Spring Lakes
Manager, Bob Boyette,
City Manager, Marion
Manager, Andrew Havens,
Town Manager, Apex
Clerk, Jacquelyn Hampton,
Town Clerk, Bolton
Attorney, Dewitt “Mac” McCarley,
Misenheimer
Undesignated Affiliate Rep.,
Tony McEwen, Assistant to the City Manager, NC Resort Towns & Cities
Undesignated Affiliate Rep.,
Mayor Chuck Allen, Military Host Cities Coalition, Goldsboro

Charlotte, Council Member Ed Driggs
Durham, Council Member Mark-Anthony Middleton
Fayetteville, Council Member Johnny Dawkins
Greensboro, Council Member Sharon Hightower
Raleigh, Council Member Kay Crowder
Winston-Salem, Council Member Jeff MacIntosh
President’s Appointment, Council Member Michael Bell, Wilson
President’s Appointment, Commissioner Kathleen Ferguson, Hillsborough
President’s Appointment, Mayor Pro Tem Margaret Haynes, Wilmington SC
The Short-Term Rental Disruption

How different communities are working with this popular property usage

By Ben Brown, NCLM Communications and Multimedia Strategist

S
hort-term vacation rentals are no new concept. Even in the evolved fashion brought about by the internet-driven “sharing economy” under names like Airbnb, HomeAway or VRBO, it’s likely you’re at least aware of these lodging services. Generally in the form of private residences rented out as overnight accommodations, they attract travelers for their palatable costs, personal charm and location variety. For participating property owners, the short-term rental game can bring relatively easy cash. For their communities, at large, it can mean more options for tourism stays.

It might all sound open-and-shut simple, but there’s a flipside to the popularity. Homes have come to act as hotels in residential zones, often without the regulation put upon the latter to keep tenants and neighbors alike safe. The activity of an Airbnb, for instance, can be so steady that it impacts the quality of neighbors’ lives. Occupancy, parking, noise, trash volume and other concerns may come to mind. Surrounding homes could even decrease in value if the negatives impose. The rental property itself should also be up to par and free of hazards for the people staying there, it’s hoped.

These and other factors -- not to mention that traditional lodging sites like hotels and motels are sources of occupancy tax revenue that Airbnb-type overnights may not be collecting, in what some would call an uneven playing field -- have inspired interesting local efforts at regulation,
varying widely per the non-homogenous nature of localities.

“Primarily it was to make sure the users of short-term rentals were protected similarly to those that were maybe renting property through a broker or a rental company,” said Michael Zehner, director of planning and development for the Town of Nags Head, which in April joined a handful of North Carolina communities with short-term rental regulations on the books. More communities are discussing them. “I think the key reason why is that city government, first and foremost, needs to protect public safety. We have regulations in place for a reason,” Brooks Rainwater, senior executive and director of the National League of Cities’ Center for City Solutions, said in an interview on the issue with Municipal Equation, the League’s podcast.

Rainwater continued: “When you think about some of the challenges with homesharing (another term for Airbnb-type services), when you stay in a hotel or you stay in a bed and breakfast, there’s sprinkler systems, there’s fire suppression systems, there’s a regular inspection series within commercial buildings that make sure that everything is safe and up to snuff.”

Sprinkler requirements and routine inspections might not present the best fit for the standard home but, in many towns, residents are asking for fair regulations to restore neighborhood harmony.

Nags Head’s rules take an educational approach. The town simply requires that short-term rental owners register with the town and acknowledge awareness of the Vacation Rental Act, a North Carolina law that spells out the rights, obligations and protections for tenants and landlords of vacation rental property, so these short-term
rental owners know that professional rental companies indeed have rules and limitations to play by. Nags Head also asks short-term rental owners to provide a local contact person who can respond to any issues that may arise.

Additionally, the town asks registrants if they have liability insurance – not under a requirement to have it, but to highlight the option. “It’s more of an awareness thing,” said Zehner.

In Cornelius, short-term rentals have to register with the town and complete a $100 “transient occupancy permit” that would have to be renewed annually. According to information collected by the UNC School of Government and published in the recent book, “Regulation and Taxation of Short-Term Rentals,” by Rebecca L. Badgett and Christopher B. McLaughlin, Cornelius limits these transient lodging sites to one individual tenancy per week, requires a local contact available around the clock to respond to issues, and doesn’t allow special events at these properties. Parking and bedroom occupancy limits also apply.

The Town of Cornelius reports that the ordinance has improved situations on the ground with short-term rentals.

“Prior to adopting our local ordinances, we had substantial issues and disturbances created by these rentals,” Cornelius Town Manager Andrew Grant said in an email. Residents had given the town examples that included noisy parties, lack of upkeep, trash load

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Brooks Rainwater, senior executive and director of the National League of Cities’ Center for City Solutions

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and other issues.

Other towns are having the conversation toward the development of ordinances that would address their respective situations.

The issue has caught state legislators’ attention in various ways, too. Late into this year’s General Assembly session, in July, an effort materialized to preempt local authority over short-term rentals. The bill would have nullified existing local regulations as sponsors angled toward private property rights and said regulations had no uniformity from town to town. The bill, at the time of this writing, was withdrawn for lack of support, with opposing legislators pointing to its flaws with local context -- municipalities indeed are not uniform -- and preemption of local decision-making. News coverage from WRAL quoted Rep. Stephen Ross, the former Burlington mayor, as saying the bill would frustrate the value of and purpose for zoning regulations, like with single-family neighborhoods and disharmonious property usage.

“Preempting local short-term rental regulations will ultimately mean fewer protections for existing residential homeowners,” the League noted in an info-sheet prepared ahead of the legislative proposal. “Those homeowners typically bought their homes believing that their neighborhoods would be shielded from commercial growth.”

It added: “Local regulation ensures that cities know the location of short-term rentals so that occupancy taxes are properly collected. Creating gaps in those collections will mean decreased dollars for tourism promotion and other needs.”

It’s certainly not just a North Carolina issue, not even confined to the United States. In July, the publication CityLab published coverage of how it’s playing out in Europe, with the story focused on 10 city governments, including Amsterdam, Barcelona and Paris, joining up on an open letter to the European Union asking for local regulatory authority with short-term rentals.

The short-term rentals story is part of the larger sharing economy, exemplified also by ridesharing services like Uber or Lyft, as ideas disruptive to our traditional models of services and accommodations get loaded into phone apps for simple, on-demand booking. There’s been precedent for it for a long time.

“The sharing economy is really ... on a continuum,” Rainwater said, “all the way from sharing library books -- I mean, the library is the perfect example of a precursor to something like the sharing economy -- to something like Uber and Lyft, where people are sharing their individually owned vehicle on a technological platform.”

These modern sharing services, including short-term rentals, rose to popularity from the last economic downturn, with people seeking new sources of income and making use of what they already had at their disposal.

“A lot of people move into single-family neighborhoods thinking that they’re going to be with other owners of those homes, or long-term renters,” Rainwater continued. “All of a sudden, you’re introducing a dynamic where people are coming in renting homes overnight or a week at
While many public leaders seek alternative revenue streams to support growing budget needs, there’s an existing revenue stream that cities can currently tap into that stems from traffic accidents that damage uninsured city property. Many cities miss revenue recovery opportunities simply because of a lack of time, tools or viable process. The money is backed by law and available, but its collection quickly becomes complex and time-consuming, so much so that cities are not able to do it.

Peachtree Recovery Services (PRS) helps cities obtain difficult-to-access revenue related to auto accidents that damage city property through a service entirely void of direct cost and effort from the cities.

These accidents are captured in traffic accident reports. Typical damages to city property include a myriad of assets such as signs, guardrails, poles, fences, fire hydrants, trees, landscaping, sidewalks, bridges, crosswalk signals, gates, drainage structures and much more.

PRS reviews all accident reports within the statute of limitations (i.e. 3 years) to identify all potential claims. After PRS identifies the responsible party, the organization assesses the damages and sends a detailed invoice and cover letter to the responsible party and their insurance carrier. After settling, negotiating and resolving claims, PRS receives money from the responsible parties or insurance companies, retains its fee and remits the remaining funds directly to cities every month—along with a detailed progress report. Because PRS handles this financial processing, cities only worry about collecting one single monthly check.

PRS utilizes its own developed tools, expediting the initialization of the service and the recovery of funds, creating the revenue stream within two months. For more information, please visit https://www.peachtreers.com.
For Gregg Schwitzgebel, the League’s Associate General Counsel and longest tenured current employee, a career dedicated toward defending and developing North Carolina’s municipalities is, in his own words, a privilege.

That work has now been deemed worthy of distinction, as Schwitzgebel was named North Carolina State University’s 2019 Distinguished MPA Alumnus.

Akin to a lifetime achievement award, the honor recognizes Schwitzgebel’s service not just to the League and its members, but to both the legal and public administration fields statewide.

“The award reflects the work I have accomplished, both internally and externally, at a place that is near and dear to my heart, that is the North Carolina League of Municipalities,” Schwitzgebel said. “The extraordinary opportunities and the extraordinary achievements that I have been able to attain in raising the visibility of the League before the judicial branch—I think that’s what this embodies.”

It is an accolade decades in the making. Infatuated with all things governmental at a young age, Schwitzgebel served as the student body president all four years of high school, and represented the State of Florida in the United States Senate Youth Program. He earned his law degree from UNC before embarking professionally on what he called “the patient route”—a two-year clerkship under later-Chief Judge Sydney S. Eagles of the North Carolina Court of Appeals. It was during this time that Schwitzgebel earned his MPA degree from N.C. State, complementing an already-earned master’s degree in political science from Emory University. He joined the League of Municipalities in 1994.

Twenty-five years later, Schwitzgebel frames his career as the story of municipal progress in North Carolina. Two cases serve as bookends: Maready v. Winston-Salem in 1996, which established the authority of municipalities to provide economic development incentives, and City of Asheville v. State of North Carolina in 2016, which was a local authority case concerning Asheville’s water system.

“These cases were critical, not only to the cities involved, but to cities across the state,” Schwitzgebel said. “My participation in those cases are among the most important achievements of my career.”

Schwitzgebel’s work outside of the courtroom has been equally impactful. In his time at the League, Schwitzgebel has founded the MPA Alumni Society at N.C. State, launched two scholarships (one for in-service MPA students and one for law clerks), and co-founded the Moot Court Program for Practitioners at the UNC School of Law. Additionally, he holds leadership positions with the North Carolina Bar Association and North Carolina Supreme Court Historic Society.
Perhaps most importantly, Schwitzgebel has been instrumental in establishing constructive, symbiotic relationships with a wide array of elected and administrative officials throughout North Carolina.

“Gregg is an outstanding attorney,” Henry P. Van Hoy II, attorney for the Town of Mocksville and past president of the North Carolina Bar Association, said. “He has rendered excellent service to the profession and the League.”

The Distinguished MPA Alumni Award is conferred by N.C. State’s Department of Public Administration, within the School of Public and International Affairs. It has been awarded each spring semester since 1991.  

SC
Talk of our Towns

Kannapolis Receives Financial Certificate of Achievement

The City of Kannapolis has once again been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Government Finance Officers Association of the U.S. and Canada. The certificate is given to governments who meet the highest levels of governmental accounting and financial accounting.

Winston-Salem Wins Employee Safety Awards From N.C. Department Of Labor

City departments and facilities received 32 gold and 11 silver awards in the N.C. Department of Labor’s annual safety awards program. The awards recognized city departments or city facilities with 10 or more employees that achieved and maintained good safety records during 2018, and maintained accurate records for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

To qualify for an annual safety award, a city department or facility must have had no fatalities during the calendar year at the site or location for which the award was given, and have maintained an injury and illness rate at least 50 percent below the national average for its particular industry group.

Gold awards are based on the DART rate, a standardized calculation used by OSHA and other regulatory agencies to compare statistically significant data. DART stands for Days Away, Restrictions and Transfers, and is a measure of injury and illness per 200,000 work hours for 100 full-time equivalent employees. It measures days lost as well as days a worker is on restricted duty or transferred to other duties because of an injury or work-related illness.

Silver awards are based only on cases with days away from work. They are recorded when the worker misses at least one full day of work, not including the day of the injury.

Nick Webster, the city’s risk manager, said, “I am very proud of our Employee Safety staff, as well as the employees of the winning facilities, for earning these well-deserved awards. These safety awards show a commitment, from front-line workers to senior managers, to making sure that everyone goes home safely to their loved ones at the end of the workday.”

Assistant City Manager Selected to Represent Rocky Mount in China

Rocky Mount Assistant City Manager Natasha Hampton was invited by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) as one of five government
professionals from the U.S., Canada and Denmark to represent their respective cities at the 2019 Qingdao International City Management Conference in Qingdao, China and Beijing City Summit in Beijing, China. Hampton also served as a panelist and subject matter expert during conference and summit events, which took place June 6-13, 2019.

Hampton spoke on the city of Rocky Mount’s approach toward precise governance is leading the charge on how municipalities address global challenges like infrastructure, housing and technology,” said Hampton. “I was honored to represent the city of Rocky Mount and share with national and international leaders in government about this governing body’s 21st century collective strategies toward addressing the diverse and complex needs of our communities.”

As a credentialed ICMA member, Hampton addressed more than 300 attendees. City representatives were chosen based on activities cities are currently engaged in relative to the topics of discussion.

Representatives must also have the necessary technical expertise, experience, background and achievements.

According to its website, ICMA is “the leading organization of local government professionals dedicated to creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.”

The ICMA China Center is a partnership between ICMA and the China University of Political Science and Law. Its mission is to “improve the quality of city management in China by providing information and services to Chinese city officials. Local government professionals from the United States, in turn, have an opportunity to learn from the Chinese experience.”

New Bern City Manager Credentialed by International Organization

City Manager Mark Stephens recently received the Credentialed Manager designation from ICMA, the International City/
County Management Association. Stephens is one of more than 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program.

ICMA’s mission is to advance professional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics, and to increase the proficiency of appointed chief administrative officers, assistant administrators, and other employees who serve local governments and regional entities around the world. The organization’s 13,000 members in 27 countries also include educators, students, and other local government employees.

To receive the prestigious ICMA credential, a member must have significant experience as a senior management executive in local government; have earned a degree, preferably in public administration or a related field; and demonstrated a commitment to high standards of integrity and to lifelong learning and professional development.

“Mr. Stephens has met a milestone in this achievement and we congratulate him,” said Mayor Dana Outlaw. “The amount of work, education and experience required to receive the ICMA credential represents a big commitment on behalf of the applicant. Mr. Stephens continues to demonstrate his expert abilities in the management of our city, which benefits all of our citizens.”

Stephens has served as New Bern’s city manager since June 2014. He was hired by the City of New Bern in January 2011 as director of public works, appointed interim city manager by the Board of Aldermen in December 2013, and appointed city manager soon after. Stephens has made significant contributions to a number of local and regional organizations including serving on the boards of Swiss Bear Downtown Development, Tourism Development Authority, Craven 100 Alliance (Craven County Economic Development), New Bern Area Chamber of Commerce, ElectriCities’ NC Eastern Municipal Power Agency, and more.
generation of folks? Yes, I’m young now, but we have to continue to build the bench. The unfortunate thing is that much of the political system is not built around making sure that young people have access and opportunity to run for elected office. If you’re not independently wealthy or retired, it makes it extremely challenging for you to serve, and I think that impacts the policy that we get out of councils or legislatures.

So what do you think the strengths are of your age in your position?

I’m, the youngest Democrat here, in the General Assembly. That has not been something, at least verbally articulated, that is any issue from any of the members I’ve talked to. Actually, it’s been more encouraging in the sense that it’s good to have some youthfulness here. But what also needs to be understood, from someone like myself being in this space, is understanding the dynamics of who’s already here. It’s kind of like, at least for me and my family, you have to respect your elders, even though I may have an idea. There are people who’ve been here before me and I can’t show up and think that I know how to run the show. You have to have that dialogue, that conversation with folks. One, so they know you’re interested, but also so you can build that relationship (and receive guidance) so that I don’t run into some of the same pitfalls. There are some lessons I don’t want to learn by experience. There are some lessons I’d rather learn by someone telling me not to do that because this is what happened to me. That’s one of the benefits of being young. Some of our senior members want to tell their story, if you’re willing to listen....

Here We Grow: Murphy

continued from page 5

“I think, if nothing else, the event last fall showed how tight our community is and what we can accomplish when we come together,” said Mayor Ramsey. “We have so many positive things happening in our town right now, and a lot of people are behind that success. It’s something we will continue to build on.”

The Short-Term Rental Disruption

continued from page 36

a time, and it just creates a different level of challenges that people perhaps weren’t expecting.”

But, he said, it can be a positive thing for local governments to work with residents and stakeholders to find a safe balance everyone can appreciate.

“We’re not trying to be heavy-handed about it,” said Zehner of Nags Head. “We hope that it’s seen as being very reasonable.”...
It is hardly news that some areas of North Carolina have been losing population and that, as a result, communities in those areas have a more difficult time attracting economic activity and delivering services to the remaining residents.

This trend goes back several decades now. It is tied, in significant measure, to the closure of textile mills and other manufacturing plants through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Of late, the North Carolina General Assembly and Gov. Roy Cooper have put focus on a key challenge related to this trend – rural water and sewer systems that have trouble keeping up with maintenance needs amid declining customer bases.

Legislation recently passed by the General Assembly would create a “Viable Utility Reserve” designed to assist struggling water and sewer systems with grants and encourage regionalization. Governor Cooper, meanwhile, proposed a major bond issue that would include $800 million for water and sewer investments.

Meanwhile, State Treasurer Dale Folwell has been leading discussions about financially struggling towns as the Local Government Commission housed in his office continues assisting those in need.

As for the League, over a year ago we created the Municipal Operations Consultants program, putting four experienced, talented municipal administrators in the field to advise members facing financial and operational challenges. From the response of our members, the program is meeting a real need.

All that said, it is important to acknowledge that, as these issues have been in the making for many years, they will not be solved quickly or easily.

According to North Carolina’s Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan, capital costs estimates for all water system needs in the state range from $10 billion to $15 billion over the next decade. Estimated costs for wastewater system needs over that same timeframe are from $7 billion to $11 billion.

Looking at how much tax base and rate-payer base communities lost as manufacturing plants closed, you can see how we got here.

Consider the Town of Robbins, in Moore County, and Milliken Mills. Not so long ago, the mill was the largest employer in the northern part of the county, with hundreds of workers and a tax value in the millions. The vacant plant, a few years ago, sold for $126,000.

A mill in Spindale that once employed 1,000 workers represented 15 percent of that town’s total tax base before it closed. There are similar stories in towns across our state.

And many of these places are incredibly resilient, with local leaders today leveraging local resources and talent to reinvent their economies.

Nonetheless, these are not easy losses to overcome.

For decades, small towns have benefited our state as job and retail hubs. The residents of these towns now need the state to come together to address these challenges comprehensively and on a statewide basis. Without a statewide approach, and one in which significant resources are put toward utility system interconnections and other investments, some towns will not survive.

In coming months, the League will be examining these issues and promoting ideas to address them in ways that consider the interests of all towns and cities and their residents. As the state association of towns and cities, we can and will tap the knowledge base and expertise of all our municipalities to best address these challenges. SC
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As a lineman for the city of Wilson, Thurman L. knows a thing or two about wires. As a parent, he also knows about wiring money to his daughter when she’s away at college. Each transfer came with a pricey $5 charge. Ouch!

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