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Bill Harris

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## CONTENTS

7 ABC System Gets Strong Legislative Look But Sees Little Change
N.C.’s liquor system prevails amid calls for privatization

18 How Different Communities Are Handling Those E-Scooters
Unique solutions for a unique issue

33 Angier Enhances its Historic Downtown, Piece by Piece
*Here We Grow* feature story

35 Mills River’s Enduring Presence
Sue Powell is named the 2019 Clerk of the Year

38 Time for Some Property and Liability Housekeeping
Take stock and prepare for the year ahead

39 Municipal Planning & Mobility
*Preferred Partners Spotlight* feature story

4 In Memoriam: Ruth Thompson
Paying tribute to our co-worker, colleague and friend

10 Leadership and the Media
The League’s newest education program opens with an essential course

12 Beautiful Music, Together
Fuquay-Varina Commissioner Bill Harris’ lifetime theme is collaboration, harmony

22 Keeping an Eye on Downtown
Sen. Ted Alexander brings a hometown focus to a statewide office

27 Sick of Flooding, Mayors Head to Iowa to See New Solutions
Local leaders explore world-class solutions

30 North Carolina’s Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan: The Road to Viability
A look at best practices for utility management

34 Retired League Attorney Hibbard Given Ernest Ball Award
Honor recognizes excellence in municipal law
INSIDE

1 Board of Directors

6 Speaking Out: Fulfillment in Governing ‘Closest to the People’

9 Facing Forward: Investing in the Advancement of Municipal Leaders

36 Risk Management Services Board of Trustees

37 From the Trust Perspective: Terminating or Seriously Demoting a Public Employee? You Should Offer a Name-Clearing Hearing.

40 Talk of our Towns

44 Taking the Field: Of Elections and Sound Revenue Streams

WRITERS THIS ISSUE

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In Memoriam: Ruth Thompson

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our co-worker, colleague and friend, Ruth Thompson.

Ruth served as a Worker’s Compensation Lost Time Adjuster, and her time at the League began in 1996. In the more than 20 years since, Ruth made a significant impression, both professionally and personally. Her gentle nature and calm demeanor were a guiding light. As evidenced by the countless tributes that have been shared in the days following her passing, Ruth’s character and kindness were impactful, appreciated by members and colleagues alike.

We remember Ruth, and keep her family in our thoughts.
Ruth Thompson was not just a coworker, she was a true friend. Always there to listen and give encouraging words. A beautiful person, both inside and out, who always had a smile that made everyone around her smile. The memories that were made will now be treasures. She is a person who will never be forgotten and always missed.

Lynn Culbreth, Workers’ Compensation Medical Adjuster, NCLM

Ruth was not only my co-worker but a great person and friend. I miss her big smile and our good morning greetings and conversations. She is truly missed and in my thoughts and prayers daily.

Sharon Harding, Workers’ Compensation Lost Time Adjuster, NCLM

Ruth executed her life’s journey in her own special, unique and quiet way, gently touching countless lives as she passed by.

Michael Naylor, Director of Human Resources and Operations, NCLM

I worked with Ruth for over 20 years and she was a special lady. She had a gentle soul and kind heart. I never heard her say a negative comment about anyone. She will truly be missed by many and I know that I will miss her dearly.

Jane Hardy, Workers’ Compensation Lost Time Adjuster, NCLM

It is hard to know what to say. Losing her has been difficult for all of us. She is so sweet, kind, loving, giving, had a quiet little laugh and is a person of great strength. She is a quiet soul. I say “is” because though she is gone from us here, she carries on in heaven. She will be greatly missed by us all in so many ways.

Anonymous, NCLM

I’ll always remember Ruth smiling—she always was. Not only was she a beautiful person, she was a great co-worker. Quiet, thoughtful, but could hit you with a zinger once in a while.

Cyndi Smith, Manager of Workers’ Compensation Claims, NCLM

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. — John 14:1

I will miss your smile. Rest in Peace, my friend.

Helen Richardson, Claims Assistant II, NCLM

Ruth always had a smile and was one of the nicest people I know. She will be missed.

Audrey Downing, Property and Liability Claims Adjuster, NCLM

I worked with Ruth for 20 years and she was a special lady. She had a gentle soul and kind heart. I never heard her say a negative comment about anyone. She will truly be missed by many and I know that I will miss her dearly.

Jane Hardy, Workers’ Compensation Lost Time Adjuster, NCLM

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Anonymous, NCLM

Ruth was a very positive and sincere person. Ruth always had a positive outlook and was always friendly. She will be truly missed. We all could learn from Ruth’s behavior towards others. She was never negative and always had a kind word.

Danise Hobson, Accounting Manager, NCLM

I met Ruth about 20 years ago. She was one of the kindest and most pleasant people I had ever met. She had a smile that was contagious and would light up a room. It was a joy to work with her.

Helen Thompson, Occupational Safety & Health Specialist, City of Jacksonville

Ruth was the type of person who, while managing mentally and emotionally challenging workers compensation claims of many injured individuals, always appeared happy and upbeat. She was a great example of the type of employees we have on the League staff, and the way her eyes lit up when she smiled was truly remarkable. I will miss Ruth.

Paul Meyer, NCLM Executive Director

I worked with Ruth for many years. She helped me and the employees of Morganton with every claim she handled. I greatly appreciated her knowledge, wisdom, and personality. I will miss not having her to call with questions or just to talk, too. I considered her more than just a claims adjuster, but a friend.

Andy Smith, Risk Management Coordinator, City of Morganton

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Helen Richardson, Claims Assistant II, NCLM
It is not unusual to hear local government elected officials repeating the mantra, “Government closest to the people governs best.”

As municipal and county officials are closest to the people, I suppose some may see the use of that phrase as self-serving. But the country’s founders believed that to be the case, which is why they created a federalist system of governance, where power and functions are shared among the national, state and local levels to best serve people.

With municipal elections just having been held across North Carolina, now is a good time to reflect on municipal government, what we do and how we do it.

In most cities and towns, those elections were held on a non-partisan basis. By and large, I think that is a good thing. Most of what we do at the local level is not driven by partisan considerations, whether it is policing our streets, collecting garbage, or planning for commercial or residential development. Municipal officials also shop in the same stores and attend the same churches as their constituents, day in and day out.

Meanwhile, we see enough partisan division at the state and national level—division that unfortunately can make it difficult to agree on budgets, health initiatives or even foreign policy.

At the local level, an awful lot of the services we provide are dictated by demand. In my city, Washington, we operate a senior center and provide recreational activities for children and adults because it is what people want and expect. Many other cities and towns do the same; some smaller municipalities do not because the demand is not there.

Some cities and towns work to bring substantial anchor tenants or attractions to their downtowns to spur business activity; others obtain grants and use local funding to revamp the look of those downtowns; others help build industrial parks to lure jobs to communities; and still others create innovative parks and amenities that improve people’s quality of life.

It is that flexibility—of stepping in to fill needed voids—that makes working as a local elected official so fulfilling, and makes for the unique tapestry of communities across our state.

And it is that flexibility that the League, as an advocacy organization, is often seeking to maintain in its work before the North Carolina General Assembly, so that municipal government can respond to the unique and diverse needs of residents.

Finally, I think that flexibility from municipalities is one reason why people feel connected to their communities and why they are generally satisfied with local government.

That they are satisfied is not just my opinion. A few years ago, the League commissioned a significant poll that asked North Carolinians if they approved of the job that their city or town government is doing. Sixty-nine percent approved, while 73 percent had positive views of their city or town’s quality of life. And a huge majority—86 percent—believed that local government should have more control over local decision-making. That finding cut across party lines.

So, when people talk about that “government closest to the people” stuff, they might just know what they are talking about.
The 2019 legislative session began with liquor on the minds of state legislators. No, no one was asking for a stiff drink as the gavel fell on the session. Many, though, were asking whether the time had come for changes to North Carolina’s system of liquor distribution and sales.

It is a system that grew out of the end of the Prohibition Era, and one where government control has been seen by many as essential to minimize public health problems and crime associated with alcohol consumption.

Legislative observers knew that changes were possible heading into the session. The General Assembly’s Program Evaluation Division, for the second time in eight years, had launched a study of the distribution and sales system. With that in mind, members of the N.C. League of Municipalities decided to take a position on the issue.

At its Advocacy Goals Conference last fall, members approved a policy goal of: “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.”

The goal made clear that municipal officials wanted to maintain control over sales outlets and preserve local revenues, but some of the filed legislation that followed pushed well beyond those limits. The original version of a bill that came from the legislative study would have required all local ABC systems—municipal and county—to merge into single systems within each county. While that provision was eventually removed from the bill as it was approved by one House committee, yet another bill that would have completely privatized the ABC system was eventually heard in that same House committee, even as its primary sponsor, Rep. Chuck McGrady of Hendersonville, acknowledged that it would not be voted on this session.

Nonetheless, the legislation began the discussion of replacing government-run ABC stores with a state permitting system of private stores.

League officials, meanwhile, stood ready to make their concerns known had any of the bills affecting local control looked likely to move forward. Angier Mayor and NCLM Board member Lew Weatherspoon was among those attending one of the House committee meetings,
Reform Bill had provisions rolled into it that would prevent the creation of any new local ABC boards, including when a new jurisdiction approves liquor sales. In that case, that jurisdiction would have to merge its ABC operations with an existing board in the county.

That bill may not be the last that we hear of ABC system changes during this legislative biennium or beyond. But as 2010 proved, changing a system that is established and that many see as furthering goals for which they hold strong convictions is never easy.

Meanwhile, the Program Evaluation Division’s own numbers showed very little growth in new stores or new local boards since it had last examined the issue in 2008. In the decade since, the total number of local ABC boards had increased by 12, to 170, representing a 7.6 percent increase. The total number of ABC stores had risen from 405 to 433, a 6.9 percent increase.

Those small increases in boards and stores took place against a backdrop of rising sales, from $691,969,293 to $1,129,132,692, representing a 63 percent increase. And revenue distributions to state and local government jumped 80 percent, from $226,083,588 to $406,129,069.

The numbers support the idea that the current system has been efficiently run, even as some critics call for privatization for other reasons.

The call for privatization is not new. Former Gov. Beverly Perdue asked for a similar examination of the system in 2010, and the N.C. ABC Commission commissioned its own study. Perdue eventually backed away and opposed privatization. One of the issues that caused her to do so was the recognition of the financial costs associated with local capital investments. Since those local boards have borrowed money to build local ABC stores based on anticipated revenues, what happens when those revenues go away and what happens to those buildings?

In this year’s debate, it also became clear that individual communities view the issues surrounding alcohol sales very differently. Forced consolidation, and less control at the community level, could lead to situations where those differences are no longer respected.

Legislators did eventually approve a significant piece of legislation affecting the system, but its primary effect is prospective rather than affecting existing local boards and stores. SB 290 ABC Regulatory
As Benjamin Franklin said, “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” To demonstrate our commitment to giving our members opportunities for lifelong learning and professional development, we are excited to announce our Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) program.

The League has always been dedicated to training staff at our member cities and towns, with courses such as law enforcement classes, risk control education, and HR training. And though elected leaders regularly benefit from those offerings, we felt that the unique demands of public office required a dedicated education program.

AML is that program. Member-driven, AML is designed to provide practical, focused, accessible, and continuous learning opportunities, and help local elected officials be successful in public office.

Our Director of Learning & Development, Vickie Miller, is heading up the program development alongside the AML Advisory Council. This council is comprised of both municipal elected and appointed officials who are representative of League cities and towns across the state. The goal is to develop a pathway to learning for elected officials to follow throughout their time in office. These pathways will be a combination of fundamentals related to the demands of good governance, as well as on-demand subjects that address the emerging issues cities and towns deal with every day.

Through AML, municipal officials will learn how to meet—and exceed—the requirements of their role in office. Courses include a nuts-and-bolts overview of North Carolina municipal government, as well as stand-alone offerings and courses offered in partnership with other entities. For example, “Essentials of Municipal Government” is a co-branded course developed with the UNC School of Government.

Working together, we have been able to redesign the curriculum so that it will be offered in one-day sessions at 11 locations throughout the state during December 2019 and January 2020. It will offer relevant content that is appropriate for any elected official, whether newly-elected or incumbent. We encourage councils to register and attend together to enhance learning and team building. Event and registration is available on our website on the Events Calendar.

For more information about Advancing Municipal Leaders and to join our mailing list, visit www.nclm.org/AML. We hope to see you both at the EMGs this winter and on your pathway to learning for your entire career as a municipal elected official. SC
“The story of governing is far different than the story of campaigning, and it’s a story elected officials have to tell,” said NCLM’s Director of Learning and Development Vickie Miller. “This will provide those key communication skills.”

The course, "Media Relations and Crisis Communications," prepares local leaders to handle the flow of regular coverage, the intensity of crisis coverage, and everything in between. It distills key points and best practices into a ready-to-use toolkit.

The class also highlights the opportunities at stake. As noted by NCLM’s Director of Political Communication and Coordination Scott Mooneyham, a media-savvy skillset can be deployed not simply as a defense against negative news reports, but also as a proactive leadership tool.

“Think of your interactions with the media as an opportunity, because it is,” said Mooneyham. “It’s an opportunity to get your message out, to tell the story of your community.”

It’s a talent that will be especially important during emergencies. In those moments—in the wake of a natural disaster, an incidence of violence, or any other number of high-stress situations—leadership needs to be on display. It becomes the duty of the elected official to stand front and center and reassure the community that its leaders are prepared to handle the situation. The course covers every step of that process.

“How you communicate can make or break a crisis,” said Kiara Jones, deputy communications director for the City of Raleigh. “There are
circumstances we can’t control, but what we can control is our response. We can prepare for these situations.”

The AML program will be ongoing, providing real-world instruction that elected officials can find in few other places. As a member-driven curriculum, the content will always be relevant and useful, and each event will provide connections and resources that can be immediately deployed. The aim is to equip our leaders with the tools for the job, not down the road, but today.

“The people demand excellence of us,” said NCLM President William Pitt. “And by holding office, you have that excellence. It’s our goal to bring that out, through practical, accessible and targeted education.”

City of Raleigh Deputy Communications Director Kiara Jones leads a segment on crisis communications. Photo credit: Ben Brown

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music
Interviewing a public official for a feature article is often about digging up the more personal, parallel narrative in his or her life, or that special talent that informs his or her style. It’s always fun to learn that a leader’s background is musical, but for longtime Fuquay-Varina Commissioner Bill Harris, his skill on the trumpet, in collaboration with other musicians, is not just trivia, and certainly no benign expression.

“My passion is music,” Harris, now serving on the League of Municipalities’ Board of Directors, told Southern City during a recent interview inside a revitalized old commercial building in downtown Fuquay-Varina, now housing an artsy coffee shop that, itself, fills with live music on weekends. But the way Harris described his connection to sound and melody, while practiced in the literal sense, begged further exploration. It didn’t take long to find a direct tie to his interest in public service, which he’s done at the local-elected level since, impressively, the 1980s.
The Pine Acres Community Center began as an important meeting place for the local African-American community. Harris participated in its creation.

Photo credits: Ben Brown

“I know part of the success of being entertaining is relating to people,” the town commissioner said after describing his history with the craft. Harris began his musical trajectory in roughly the 6th grade, getting involved with the school marching band, “playing, being out,” he said. The skill was right—from high school and into grown family life, he was entertaining crowds with ensembles, having a blast but cementing ancillary skills that would set his way of life.

“I think the music, being out, it kind of prepared me for being able to interact with a lot of different people at different levels, being in different environments, so I think coupled with the commitment that I saw in my parents, it’s sort of a natural progression for me to be in the public arena,” Harris explained.

The Fuquay-Varina native grew up when lawful segregation was still a terrible fact, but he developed a closeness with his community and understood early the value of civic interest. It’s not that his parents were necessarily political, but his mother was a popular barber.

“In the barber shop, my mom, I guess to protect me from the streets, I stayed in the barber shop a lot and I shined shoes, and I would hear the men come in and I would hear their conversations, and the conversations were about politics, were about current events,” he recalled.

Meanwhile, it never took much to get his personable dad interested in any community project, exposing Harris directly to the fruits of working hard together.

Asked for a highlight, Harris shared the story of the Pine Acres Community Center.

“It was an effort by, at that time, the African-American community to build a meeting place,” he said. “It’s a great story because the community got together, raised the funds, solicited the donations, and went house-to-house selling this idea that...
He said kids his age would act as supports for the brick masons, like his father.

“So that building, and that place, was built with... collaboration and coordination,” said Harris. “I remember seeing the foundations and the footing, and now that building has existed since 1962.”

It was the direct and lasting result of hands-on community initiative—certainly an impact-lesson for Harris. But those experiences, paired with the connective power of music-making, didn’t all come together in

Young Harris, included.

“Everybody volunteered, it was totally volunteer, and we were young kids but everybody had a part to play,” he said. “My part was to go and provide the labor. Whatever I could do, free, for a couple hours on Saturday.”

we needed a place where we could meet and could recreate. You still had separate worlds at that time. And I remember my father being part of those conversations, when the men would encourage everyone to participate.”
any thought of official public service until an assignment in high school.

“I was asked to do a paper on Senator Edward Brooke,” Harris said. Brooke was the first African-American elected to the U.S. Senate, where he represented Massachusetts from 1967-79 (and previously as that state’s elected attorney general).

“We had to do the research, and then we had to make a presentation to the class,” Harris said. “At that time, when I grew up, it was during the segregated era... Prior to that, the opportunities afforded me, I didn’t get that spark until high school that there was a possibility of public service.

“I remember when I was speaking to the assembly and giving them my report on Senator Brooke, I was like, this is something different...”

And that’s what made his pursuit of music so important—the life skill of relating to people and making them feel good, of communicating real concepts or emotions, of being confident working with a diversity of people, and so on. And the musical elements of harmony, orchestration, rhythm and collaboration aren’t lost on him as they relate to community service, such as what built the Pine Acres Community Center.

“These kinds of things I think prepared me,” said Harris, whose past also includes teaching and work as a probation officer. For nearly three decades now, he’s worked in state government in various positions with any thought of official public service until an assignment in high school.

the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services and its Division of Mental Health.

He’s also served on the Town of Fuquay-Varina’s committees on finance, public safety, and public works, and was a member of the Wake County Growth Task Force representing his municipality, which has seen staggering growth in the past decade-plus. Now one of Wake County’s larger municipalities, Fuquay-Varina (itself a duet of municipalities, Fuquay Springs and Varina, which merged in the 1960s) has shifted from agricultural hub, with downtown stores chiefly supporting farmers, to a more diverse economy and mix of lifestyles.

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That makes the elements of harmony and collaboration all the more important for Harris as the town continues charting stout growth, but he indicated good feelings, per recent developments like the relocation of Fuquay-Varina Town Hall to the downtown area. Town officials just cut the ribbon in October; it occupies the former headquarters of the Bob Barker Company, one of the town’s prominent corporate residents. Answering to a more-than-doubling of the town’s population in recent history, the new facility is more than twice the size of the previous town hall.

Between the lines, Harris said he saw a warm banding-together of residents and same-page teamwork with the private sector in creating something monumental in a growing and changing area. “There was a desire from the community,” he said.

Harris continues his musicianship for the people, playing solo at banquets, church events and community gatherings, like the Nov. 9 BBQ, Blues and Brews festival coming to town, which is exactly what its name entails (and has yet to take place as of this writing). Harris will be on brass, with a group, performing for the community that he’s helped to grow since his youth. The event will raise funds for the Fuquay-Varina Downtown Association. SC

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Advancing Municipal Leaders

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It was 2015, and the misuse of flying skateboards in public spaces was all the talk in city council chambers and state legislatures across the U.S. They were zipping down sidewalks, colliding with pedestrians and occasionally with one another as the popularity of these levitating boards grew and grew for transportation and recreation alike. In one infamous mishap, in the small California town of Hill Valley, rivaling teens clashed in a hoverboard rampage across the town square, throwing vehicle traffic into disorder and climaxing when the young roustabouts crashed through and completely shattered the historic clocktower-courthouse’s decorative glass facade. The melee was so spectacular it made the cover of USA Today.

Well, okay, maybe that only happened in the confines of the 1989 Robert Zemeckis film, “Back to the Future Part II,” which is entirely fictional, hoverboards and all. But it’s certainly played its way into minds as peppy personal transportation devices in the real-world, like e-scooters (and, though to a lesser extent, e-skateboards and e-bike rentals), seem to have exploded onto the scene in recent years. That’s often via the distribution of scooters across downtowns and campus areas by “shared mobility” or “micromobility” companies—what we’re talking about when we think of popular pay-for-use scooter companies like Bird and Lime—and with unready local governments wary of their impacts on untested and sometimes densely populous settings. “They (a shared-mobility company) came in, they put the scooters out and they just started operating... And, just look, scooters everywhere,” Marlene Davis with the City of Winston-Salem said with a laugh.

This isn’t to say the advent of e-scooters, whether rented or personally owned, is bad; they’ve certainly proven popular for their efficiency and affordability. They also look pretty fun to use (though this writer has not attempted). They have, however, increasingly come under regulation as cities seek to accommodate with some kind of balance.

Winston-Salem is one of those cities, its government in October having announced the regulated appearance of scooters with companies placing about a hundred Spin two-wheelers (a brand from the Ford company) on the streets for public use. At the time, a second sharing company had applied with the city to begin operations that month as well.

Previously, under a different company’s operation, e-scooters placed out in...
Winston-Salem were generating complaints about safety, Davis said.

“There were no helmets used. Kids were riding them on the sidewalks, which is not allowed in the city,” she explained. “Rules were not enforced.”

Until they were. The city in March adopted ordinance language keeping e-scooter rentals between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. and only by persons 16 or older. They’re not allowed on sidewalks or greenways. They can’t be in Old Salem or any public park. Generally, they’re legitimate vehicles that have to obey traffic rules, have to yield to pedestrians in the public right of way, and can’t park just anywhere.

The city encourages helmet use. Greensboro’s e-scooter conversation picked up in summer 2018 after the vehicles appeared there in number, with local media noting that ordinance language of the time couldn’t fully cover them.

“Part of what makes downtown Greensboro so much fun is all of the new modes of transportation available,” city government said in an August 2018 statement reported by news channel WFMY. “We currently have LimeBikes, Brew Peddlers,

“One of the major lessons gleaned from the short history of micromobility is that companies will encourage but not enforce safety standards. That responsibility falls squarely on the city’s shoulders.”

*National League of Cities*
Greensboro Rickshaw, Caddie and now Bird scooters. Our number one concern though with all of these is safety. Currently the scooters are not allowed on downtown sidewalks and city streets, but we have multiple departments reviewing the existing ordinance in an effort to update it to accommodate all of these, including scooters.”

The City of Greensboro just recently put out a survey asking residents’ feelings toward e-scooters. With it, the city is documenting the users’ parts of town, whether he or she has ever ridden an e-scooter, thoughts about what would make e-scooter use better or more popular, and guesses as to what’s already in law or regulated when it comes to the scooters’ use in city limits.

“If Council decides to continue allowing shared micromobility programs in the City, a request for proposals for new operation permits will be released in 2020,” the city said in a release. Currently, Lime has a permit with the city to operate there.

As different cities crafted custom ways to address scooters, the N.C. General Assembly this year circulated bills with varying angles on regulation. None had passed into law as of this writing and only one, House Bill 77, which sought a statutory definition for the e-scooter and an exemption from vehicle registration requirements, received a favorable chamber vote. The filed version of that bill included other language not supported by cities, removed in a later edition of the bill, to allow scooter use on roads, sidewalks, and bike paths, and allowed scooters to be parked on sidewalks so long as they did not impede pedestrian traffic. While the later version of the bill removed that objectionable language, it still would make any ordinance adopted by a municipality that conflicted with the bill null and void. This
version of HB 77 awaits Senate action. Other legislative approaches that came up along the way favored comprehensive regulation of e-scooters, with points about insurance and collection of user- or trip-data.

If one thing’s for sure, e-scooters have us thinking, and that’s played into conversations about the future of community transportation altogether. Scooter companies like Bird and Lime have heralded themselves as a great step away from reliance on combustion-engine vehicles to get around, thus de-congesting the streets and with less tailpipe exhaust to breathe. According to a report from the National League of Cities (NLC), Bird and Lime (both founded in 2017) have already passed the $1 billion valuation mark—each.

NLC says the best approach right now as scooter popularity grows—and scooters do rate well in public acceptance—is, for one, to get ahead of any “surprise deployments,” like when a company overnight drops off a load of scooters around town for the first time, without any advance communication.

“Micromobility providers should be communicating with city officials and stakeholders. But for city officials, the risk is in not being proactive,” NLC says in a whitepaper titled “Micromobility in Cities.” Those unprepared “are essentially relinquishing control of public assets to private companies, while simultaneously taking on the implementation costs of incorporating a new mode. Furthermore, local governments will be held accountable by residents if there are any mishaps or friction.”

They also recommend cities get to know the safety considerations.

“One of the major lessons gleaned from the short history of micromobility is that companies will encourage but not enforce safety standards,” says NLC. “That responsibility falls squarely on the city’s shoulders.” Municipalities should also seek trip data, consult with more experienced cities and place a focus on equity. According to NLC, “Providing equitable transportation options is one of micromobility’s greatest potential offering.”

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Proven time and again by local revivals all across the state, the benefits gleaned from a successful downtown redevelopment are wide-ranging: economic growth, increased tourism, improved quality of life. As the former mayor of Shelby and executive director of the Main Street Program in Shelby and Bedford, Va., Sen. Ted Alexander experienced those successes first-hand.

His approach to the task, coming primarily from a standpoint of historic preservation, may have been unique. The results, though, were tangible, and the lessons universal. It was a valuable education for the first-term senator. Having navigated that hands-on work for years, Sen. Alexander brings to Raleigh an attitude of collaboration and communication. He also appreciates the impact that decisions at the legislature have on leaders back home.

His role may have changed, but the goals of community-building remain the same. That’s something that, as Alexander says below, “transcends political leaning.”

How has your first year at the legislature been?
It’s going great so far. I’m enjoying it, and I’m learning a lot. I’ve really enjoyed getting to know everybody, see how the system works, and try to help out our people in the district.

Matched expectations?
It’s about what I thought it would be. You never know quite what to expect, but yes, I would say so.

Let’s go back to your background. From your education, it seems like you were drawn to politics early on. Can you walk me through that path into your career?
I had been interested in government and political stuff from a young age. When I went to UNC-Charlotte, the way I chose it is, they had the North Carolina Student Legislature. I was at a student fair, and I saw that. I thought about going into the Coast Guard, but my counselor at school and everybody had talked me into going to college. I had an interest in it, so I said, “Well, I’ll look around.” Literally, the first time I ever saw the campus was the day I got there. And I loved it. Loved the experience, loved learning political science.

I still, though, was interested in history, and I got interested in historic
preservation particularly, under Dr. Dan Morrill, who is still the director of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historical Landmarks Commission. I got an internship with the state for a summer in the preservation office. So, I looked around for preservation-oriented schools—there weren't many at the time—and I chose Cornell, where I got a graduate degree in historic preservation.

From there, I got into the downtown revitalization side of historic preservation. I was downtown director in Shelby, but I realized, you know, God wanted me to do something different, to run for mayor and make a difference. And so I did. I ran for mayor, wasn’t supposed to win, but I did. Was then re-elected, and after eight years, I thought I had done most everything I thought I wanted to do.

Historical preservation was an interesting avenue here. What about that was so intriguing to you?

So many people have misconceptions about historic preservation. They think it’s all about somebody telling you what color you can paint your house in a historic district. It’s not. To me, it’s important, one, because you are preserving tangible pieces of your heritage and your built environment.

There’s also, in some degrees, the patriotic aspect of preserving your past, your history. As time has evolved, I’ve also come to realize how important it is for economic development purposes. It’s a great tool. One, you’re taking space that would otherwise be empty or vacant in downtown and you’re putting new life back into it. You’re finding new uses. You’re preserving the building. Two, it’s key for tourism. How many cities now do people want to go to because they’re a destination, because they have this historic character? People will say, “Oh, this is a really cool place.” That coolness comes from the fact that you’ve got this tremendous backdrop of historic
properties. People are drawn to that, they have an affinity for it. People remember going to downtowns years ago when they were younger. And young people really love downtowns, and they see opportunities to live there. In any city, at least two percent of the population will live downtown. If you build the places, people will move in.

We’ve seen all these old mills all over North Carolina revitalized through the Mill Tax Credits and the State Historic Tax Credits, which are hopefully going to be extended this year. We’ve just seen tremendous value as a result of those credits and what they mean. I see preservation as just one more tool—just like industrial recruitment.

You worked for the Main Street program too, correct?

I did. Shelby was part of the Main Street network, and I was director of the uptown Shelby Association. I did also work for the state Main Street Program in Virginia for two and a half years, in the early ‘90s.

You’ve touched local government from several areas: mayor, Main Street, other preservation efforts. Do you think a well-rounded approach like that is beneficial?

I will tell you, in my estimation, the Main Street Program especially gives you a well-rounded experience on a variety of issues that you would never otherwise think of. You could never devise a curriculum to learn this stuff. Half of life—probably more than half of life—is learning how things work. And that Main Street experience teaches you how things work. It gives you quite a background in different skills.

Those were hands-on roles. Was it a tough transition moving to a legislative role, and what’s the added value to being here as opposed to being there?

Here, it’s a different vantage point. Having been at the local level, having been on the ground and walking the streets, literally going from store to store, you get to really feel the pulse of what’s going on. It gave me that perspective of how important what we do here is for downtowns, cities and counties. What we do affects them. It’s given me an empathy for those people who are on the ground and in the field.

What other relationships with local governments have you maintained or developed in this new role?

I will say one thing. During my tenure as mayor, one of the things I was really proud of was that we built a really good relationship with other units of government within the county, including the county commissioners. Part of that was out of necessity. In the early 2000s, Cleveland County, like many other textile counties in North Carolina, was still in a recession. We didn’t have to wait for the recession of 2008. We were already in it. We had to learn how to get together and work together, because we were grasping to do whatever we could do to make our county a better place and create jobs. That still pervades, I think, and I see that regionally in Lincoln County and Gaston County, where I represent now. For counties and towns willing to do that, it gives them a tremendous advantage when it comes to economic development recruiting. If I’m a business looking to locate, and I pick up that there is tension or conflict within the area, then I’m saying, “OK, I see another area that has equally
That collaborative approach is surely helping you here as well.
I think so. You really have to learn how to work with folks.

How does that affect your processing as a lawmaker, having served in that municipal role?
It sometimes becomes kind of tough. Things that I look at one way can be looked at differently by, say, the committee or leadership, and trying to reconcile those two perspectives can be a challenge. What I want to avoid are situations where it’s us against them. I dislike that. I come from the cooperative school that says, “Hey, we can work this out.” Come together and we’ll end up with a good solution.

Do you have any goals you hope to achieve either now or by the time you’ve racked up a series of terms?
One area I really see the need for now is the trades, and getting people to get interested in those trades. With a preservation background, it’s especially important. We need people that are not only electricians and masons and plumbers and HVAC people and carpenters and machinists and mechanics, but also people who know how to do things for historic buildings. There’s a whole opportunity out there for people who want to get into that. It’s a wide-open opportunity. We’re losing people that don’t know how to do this stuff. And if they will value-add what they can do with the trades and take it further a step for the historic stuff, that’s great. There’s a need for it.

That need is only increasing, right? Your work on historic preservation and downtown revitalization was, in a way, ahead of the curve. Now they are happening everywhere, all across the state.
Yes. I was involved in the days when we were slogging it out, trying to come up with anything we could think of to revitalize a downtown. We had suffered because of the onset of suburban shopping centers, people leaving downtowns, department stores leaving. Now, the Main Street approach, I think, has given one of the best road maps to revitalization, if towns will follow it—if they don’t allow politics, in the sense of non-cooperation, to get in the way. If they’ll follow the four points and the
eight principles, and they don’t get stupid, it’ll work. We’ve shown that over time. You are right. So many towns now—how many are just seeing such growth? People visit there and have events there. People say, “Let’s go downtown.”

Exactly. Downtowns are the visualization of a community, and you want to build your town around that.

It also helps with business recruitment. They’ll look at your downtown and see what you think of yourself. If you have a dumpy looking place that’s boarded up and looks like nobody cares, then they’ll say, “Well, nobody cares about this place. What does it have to offer me?” Now, I’m conservative. So, thinking about this from a conservative standpoint, if you build up your downtown, the tax base grows. What does that do for everyone else? It lessens the tax pressure. If you can build up and increase your value in a relatively small part of the town that already has the infrastructure in place—you’re not running water and sewer lines and incurring all that expense, they’re already there—then you have opportunities for housing. You have opportunities for retail, for restaurants. You have the potential to bring in tourists. It’s a great thing to build up. Plus, on top of that, you’re saving a part of your history. That transcends any political leaning.

‘It gave me that perspective of how important what we do here is for downtowns, cities and counties. What we do affects them.’ - Sen. Alexander.

Photo credit: Ben Brown

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Kinston Mayor Dontario Hardy puts the spark of his elected service in a name: Matthew.

“Matthew pushed me all the way over to actually run for office, to help my city and make it better in response to hurricanes,” he said.

“Emergency preparedness is the key to getting your city back. If we can’t respond properly, if we can’t get the resources we need to respond, we’re going to be in a hurt locker.”

Hardy is of course referring to the merciless 2016 hurricane that left so many communities, Kinston included, with lives harmed or lost, homes and businesses ruined in floods, economic flows kinked, and with painful marks on the psyche. It wasn’t about to end, either; storms to follow, like Florence and Michael and those of the 2019 season, have seen to that.

Tired of measuring, again and again, the disastrous levels of water inside people’s homes and businesses after major storms—if it wasn’t flash-flooding, it would be flooding from the cresting local river—Hardy and other mayors in the same boat have involved themselves in a special initiative to better understand the possibilities for resilience. What are the world-class approaches to protecting communities from flood damage? Who’s already using these practices? They’re probably expensive, so how do we know what’s worth the investment?

In search of answers, Hardy packed his bags and went to Iowa. “I learned a lot,” he said with a laugh.

He wasn’t the only one. In late August, the Environmental Defense Fund in collaboration with the Iowa Flood Center at the University of Iowa convened a diversity of North Carolina-based public officials like Hardy and individuals from the private and nonprofit sectors to see first-hand what’s been happening in the Iowa city of Cedar Rapids, which has been working with upstream farmers and landowners to address risk of flooding—something Iowa cities, too, are tired of. In June 2008, for one, Cedar Rapids was unlucky enough to have experienced a 500-year storm event—meaning a cataclysmic amount of water, enough to have pushed the loss estimate to nearly $5.4 billion once tallies were possible. It also put 18,000 residents out of their homes.

The City of Cedar Rapids was subsequently worthy of an organized change effort and secured just south of $100 million from the U.S.
Department of Housing and Urban Development for it. What followed was the Iowa Watershed Approach, meant to help the ag-state’s farm economy and to reduce flood risk, all at once. It’s designed to foster cooperation between all big sectors affected by flooding and reduces tension when the time comes to make helpful investments. It’s just necessary at this point, said one of the Iowa tour’s leaders, Larry Weber of the Iowa Flood Center.

“Gone are the days when we would recover from an event thinking it was the once-in-a-lifetime event, therefore, we don’t have to worry,” said Weber of floods. “The reality has shown that not only are these things (exceptionally powerful storms or flood events) happening, they’re happening with greater frequency. So we’ve got to build back smarter and with greater resilience.”

The Iowa approach is like a systematic re-do in flood observation. The Flood Center works to improve resilience in three cities in nine watershed communities across that state. This picks up incorporated and unincorporated areas alike, as “flooding knows no jurisdictional boundary,” Weber noted.

The work starts with the formation of a watershed management authority, which invites all cities, counties and soil-and-water conservation districts in the watershed. A watershed coordinator is hired; the team does a hydrologic assessment and works with planning consultants to create watershed plans; they deploy sensors to monitor streams and rivers and soil conditions for moisture and temperature readings that may indicate flooding onset; they assess all conservation work that exists in the watershed; and they deploy resources to build conservation practices on private lands to hold water back, reduce flooding during heavy rainfall and improve water quality, as runoff reduction can reduce the amount of undesirable materials washing from developed or industrial areas into waterways.

To round it out, the Iowa team uses mathematical models to quantify the benefits of those built conservation...
practices along with collected sensor data over what is now five years of the program’s existence.

With full adoption of the conservation measures valued by the team, they estimate they can show a 40 percent reduction in streamflow during a 100-year-rainfall, which in Iowa represents about 7.5 inches in 24 hours.

“So if we can get a 40-percent reduction in streamflow during these extreme rainfalls, that’s a gamechanger for a lot of people who live in those communities along the rivers and streams,” said Weber.

Hardy, who said he learned about the collaboration via the N.C. Metropolitan Mayors Coalition, particularly liked the sensor technology, to help better understand how water behaves in different scenarios locally. An Iowa mapping system that impressed Hardy provides “real-time science-based flood information for more than 1,000 communities and other locations in Iowa,” he said.

Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo, who was also part of the Carolina-to-Iowa contingent, expressed excitement about the incorporation of “smart” technologies, like sensors, to better understand how stormwater interacts with specific developed environments.

“We’re using more and more of it,” Saffo said. “And it has helped us focus on more specific areas and where the problem areas are, so we can micro-focus on those areas that we know will have flooding.”

Saffo grew up in coastal Wilmington and has therefore seen his fair share of rough hurricanes and tropical storms. The longtime mayor said his city has fared relatively well since the introduction in the 1990s of a local stormwater fee to improve conditions on the ground.

“We’ve spent I believe close to about $100 million on these projects,” Saffo said. “Obviously, we have a significant amount of projects left, but it alleviated a lot of flooding in the city limits.”

He added that harder-hit unincorporated areas may soon benefit from a recent city-county collaboration toward a countywide stormwater management plan.

But it takes money, and both Hardy and Saffo said all levels of

continued on page 43
Clean, safe water is needed by every citizen and business in North Carolina, whether for drinking and cooking or for industrial and manufacturing purposes. There is no more basic infrastructure need than the constructed systems that clean and transport this irreplaceable resource.

The long-term viability of any critical infrastructure system, no matter how resilient and sustainable it is, ultimately relies upon the human and organizational stewardship the infrastructure system receives. Infrastructure investments that are deferred year after year result in growing infrastructure deficits. The owners of utilities and other water professionals must be prepared to invest in their economic future by taking the steps needed to address infrastructure challenges.

Addressing the Challenges: The State Water Infrastructure Authority

The North Carolina General Assembly created the State Water Infrastructure Authority (Authority) to assess the state’s water and wastewater infrastructure needs, the role of the state in funding needed infrastructure, and the funding programs currently available to local governments and utilities.

The Authority recognizes that the state’s most important role related to water and wastewater infrastructure needs is to foster the long-term viability of individual utilities.

The Authority’s approach to assisting water utilities is presented in “North Carolina’s Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan: The Road to Viability.”

The Master Plan applies broadly to owners and operators of water and wastewater utilities and systems that serve the public. The Authority’s goal is for utilities to:

- Recognize that users and beneficiaries of water infrastructure must pay, to the greatest extent possible, for the cost of operating, maintaining, and renewing that infrastructure
- Be proactive in the management of water infrastructure by understanding the condition of infrastructure, identifying the most critical components, and establishing prioritized long-term renewal and modernization plans that promote transparent

### Vision for the Future

The state will best be able to meet its water infrastructure needs by ensuring individual utilities are, or are on a path to be, viable systems

- A viable system is one that functions as a long-term, self-sufficient business enterprise, establishes organizational excellence, and provides appropriate levels of infrastructure maintenance, operation, and reinvestment that allow the utility to provide reliable water services now and in the future

The state’s role is to provide resources to help utilities address organizational and financial management challenges that may be contributing to physical infrastructure limitations

decision-making with customers and stakeholders

- Establish financial plans that enable the utility to fund both operation and maintenance as well as long-term infrastructure renewal, without long-term reliance on grant funds

**Best Management Practices**

Best practices in utility management are essential for viable utility systems that are robust in the three key integrated focus areas, shown in Figure 1.

- **Infrastructure Management**: By taking proactive approaches to enable the right investments to be made in the right projects at the right time, taking into consideration life-cycle costs and risk management
- **Organizational Management**: Through governing boards (elected officials, appointed officials and owners) understanding the long-term nature of water/wastewater systems and prioritizing the financing and completion of the most critical infrastructure projects
- **Financial Management**: Through sufficient revenue generation to fund infrastructure construction, maintenance, operations, renewal/replacement, and reserves for unexpected events, without long-term reliance on grant funds

**Achieving the Vision**

Achieving viable water utilities across North Carolina requires actions by the state, local governments and water utility providers to:

- Ensure that, to the greatest extent practicable, water utilities operate as enterprise systems that generate sufficient revenue to cover all operating, maintenance, and capital expenditures, as well as funding reserves for unexpected events
- Promote viable water utilities through the state water infrastructure funding programs
- Acknowledge that when water utilities are not viable or are not on a path to become viable, solutions are needed that go beyond simply constructing or repairing infrastructure

As shown in Figure 2, moving forward in achieving utility viability involves:

- **Resource partnerships** among state and federal agencies, key...
organizations and utility providers for more cohesive support as they work to reach and maintain viability by leveraging existing resources and programs

- **Resources and tools** that support proactive utility management
- **Prioritized funding** that is linked to utility viability

Infrastructure Funding

Over the next 20 years, capital cost estimates for water and wastewater system needs in North Carolina range from $17 to $26 billion—most likely at the higher end of the range.

While subsidized loans are the primary vehicle to help make infrastructure more affordable, the Authority recognizes that only a fraction of today’s infrastructure capital needs can be met with currently available state or federal subsidized funding levels.

Summary

Utilities must know their full cost of providing services in order to establish the value of water to the affected community, including governing boards, rate payers and

**continued on page 43**

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**EMPLOYMENT ADVICE INCLUDING DISCIPLINE AND REQUESTS FOR ACCOMMODATION** • **REPRESENTATION AS TOWN ATTORNEY**
Angier Enhances its Historic Downtown, Piece by Piece
Through gradual developments, Angier is creating a stronger community

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.

The Town of Angier has begun a series of incremental improvements designed to enhance the look, feel, and walkability of the community. Following the time-proven methods of the Main Street America Program, the Town has chosen several areas to redesign and create community gathering areas. The goal is to produce a more inviting and appealing downtown, while preserving the historic character of the Downtown District. The Town is promoting stronger community engagement from stakeholders, which it believes is essential to producing the momentum for success.

A landscaping project, bench project and a new mural have already been implemented. With proposed projects to include redesigned curbs, expanded sidewalks and the addition of traffic bollards to certain downtown street corners, the town will focus on creating and improving outdoor downtown areas. These projects will open up areas for increased foot traffic and community gathering spaces with safety and accessibility being key features.

“The projects that we have already completed have brought a lot of attention to the downtown,” said Downtown Manager Christy Adkins. “The stakeholders in the area are becoming more involved and beginning to believe that changes will be made that are beneficial to the central business district.” The planned renovation of the historic caboose at the Depot Square, with its close proximity to the historic Depot building and the Angier museum, will provide a destination for railroad tourism.

Art will also play a crucial role in Angier. The Town intends to spotlight local artists by displaying their artwork. The murals, exterior art pieces, brick pavers, and landscaping, which will be placed in the new gathering spaces, will transform previously underutilized areas into inviting cultural spaces.

The Town became a Main Street Designated Affiliate Program in June of 2018 and hired a Downtown Main Street Manager in January of this year. With a commitment of funding from the Town and hard work from all of the Town Staff, coordination with the many civic organizations, churches and the dedicated stakeholders in the downtown area, Angier will be projecting a continually improving image and providing a greater quality of life for residents. SC
The Ernest Ball H. Award is reserved for persons whose excellence in municipal law in North Carolina is due for high honors. And there wasn’t any doubt this year that Kim Hibbard, who for almost three decades worked in the League’s legal department and retired as its general counsel, should be a recipient.

At the North Carolina Association of Municipal Attorneys’ conference this past August in Asheville, Hibbard, along with former Charlotte city attorney Bob Hagemann, received the distinguished award to a standing ovation at a dinner banquet well attended by peers and family.

Perhaps justifying a piece of that award, Hibbard accepted and gave remarks humbly and appreciatively.

“I have great respect for municipal attorneys and the important and challenging work they do for our communities on a daily basis,” she later said. “I was honored to be recognized by the association, and certainly humbled to be included among a group of attorneys that I consider to be my mentors.

“I hope that I was able to provide even a fraction of that value and service to others during my career at the League,” she added.

Observers would assert she did. Hibbard joined the League in 1989 and went on to play central roles in innumerable legal accomplishments for North Carolina cities and towns. Otherwise, she was a daily sage to municipal officials wrestling with legal questions and hypotheticals.

“She is a talented professional with the highest ethical standards,” said League General Counsel John Phelps, who worked alongside Hibbard since he’d arrived at the League in 1995 and succeeded her in her retirement.

While professional habits are die-hard for some retirees, Hibbard says she’s enjoying life.

“I am happily retired, spending time with my husband and teenage daughter, tending to a menagerie of parrots, chickens, dogs and chinchilla, catching up with friends, and doing various home projects,” she said in October via email.

Hagemann, who also received the Ball Award, is also a former League attorney, having spent a period as its
MILLS RIVER’S Enduring Presence

Sue Powell, at one time the town’s only employee, has been named the 2019 Clerk of the Year

By Jack Cassidy, NCLM Communications Associate

To find the backbone of a municipality, look in the Clerk’s office, where the bottom-line work of the city gets done. That notion holds especially true in Mills River with Sue Powell, who has kept the town orderly every day of its existence.

“She is an enduring presence for the town,” said Mills River Mayor Chae Davis. “I appreciate her more each time I work with her.”

Her service has not gone unnoticed, as the North Carolina Association of Municipal Clerks named Powell its 2019 Clerk of the Year.

Born in the suburbs of Chicago, Powell moved to North Carolina in 1974, and quickly planted roots. She attended high school in Brevard and college at High Point University, before earning a paralegal certificate at Meredith College and a Master’s of Public Affairs from Western Carolina University.

The civic interests that guided her educational tract soon led her to Mills River, which, while a historic community, was not a chartered municipality at the time. Powell worked to change that, joining the incorporation committee that in due course put the town, literally, on the map. Upon the Town of Mills River’s establishment in 2003, Powell was its first and only employee.

“It was both exciting and frightening at the same time,” said Powell. “Clerk, receptionist, book keeper—I did everything. I had to lock the door to go to lunch.”

There’s been no shortage of excitement since. The town has changed in both size and focus—from farming to industry—and, as Powell sees it, is on the brink of “exploding” with even more development in the coming years. The once-new highway is fast becoming a commercial corridor, and more than 7,000 people now call Mills River home. Equally dramatic has been the transformation of Town Hall, where the one-woman office has evolved into a full-fledged civic operation.

Through it all, Powell has been there, graciously accepting and ceding responsibilities as needed. Hats worn include tax collector, which was temporary, and finance officer, a role she still holds. Despite the fluctuations, Powell’s commitment to her work has been unaffected. As she’ll tell you, the town comes first.

“In 16 years, I have never had the same day twice,” said Powell. “It has been my honor and privilege to be a part of this town, from the first day, and to see what it’s become.”

The Clerk of the Year honor, which rewards commitment to community and extraordinary performance on the job, was bestowed by Powell’s peers. But it was the recognition from her Mills River colleagues—who attended the ceremony in numbers despite a four-hour roundtrip—that perhaps most humbled Powell. It was a gesture of appreciation she did not anticipate.

And yet, given the achievement of overseeing a town’s entire history, a long drive seems only fitting.

“It was the highlight of my career,” said Powell. SC
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As is the unfortunate reality, municipalities, like all workplaces, will occasionally have to terminate employees. When those situations arise, there are several items that must be considered beforehand, among them due process, discrimination, retaliation, and reasonable accommodations.

Yet even with those items vetted, municipalities may need to take the process one step further by offering a name-clearing hearing.

What exactly is a name-clearing hearing? It is a procedural due process right. The offering of this hearing allows the former employee the opportunity to clear their name, publicly, regarding the policy violation that has been alleged against him or her. Further, this hearing allows the former employee to explain why the charges are false, so that he or she is not stigmatized from obtaining future employment opportunities.

In other words, it gives the employee a chance to defend themselves. It is likely that the termination will threaten the public employee’s reputation or future employment opportunities. This is the employee’s liberty interest, protected under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which dictates that “no state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law...” If a terminated employee is not offered a name-clearing hearing, then their constitutionally protected liberty interest may be violated. Of course, for municipalities, this is a situation that must be avoided.

To preserve their rights, the employee is entitled to a public hearing in which they can dispute the charges against them. The hearing must be offered if the circumstances of the employee’s termination meets the following criteria: it placed a stigma on the employee’s reputation, violations were made public by the employer, violations were made in conjunction with the employee’s termination or demotion, and the allegations were false.

If the governing board or town manager moves forward with the termination and a dismissal letter in which negative or stigmatizing information is issued, a name-clearing hearing must occur. If a dismissal letter does not contain negative or stigmatizing information, no name-clearing hearing is required. There is one exception: If the employee being terminated is a law enforcement officer and the Form F5-B that is submitted to Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission does have negative or stigmatizing information, then the former employee must be offered a name-clearing hearing before the dismissal letter is made public.

If you have questions about name-clearing hearing as part of due process, the League is here to help. Reach out to Human Resource Consultants Heather James (hjames@nclm.org) or Hartwell Wright (hwright@nclm.org) for guidance and further information. SC
Time for Some Property and Liability Housekeeping

By Jack Cassidy, NCLM Communications Associate

With hurricane season behind us and the end of the calendar year approaching, it’s something of a quiet season for municipalities, at least on the risk-management front. Time to take stock, and prepare for the year ahead. Time for some important housekeeping.

“There’s no better time to get things in order,” said NCLM’s Lisa Kinsey. “Municipalities already have the information they need. This is just a reminder to review it.”

The housekeeping should begin with a municipality’s list of assets, which all local governments have. This document should detail all owned property, from buildings and water towers to the smaller items within those structures. This list should not just be read, but meticulously reviewed by taking a physical inventory to ensure that nothing has been left off.

Once the list is in order, cross-reference that document with the insurance schedules. The same questions apply to mobile assets, which will likely be listed on the Inland Marine schedule. Items such as tractors, generators, lawn mowers, and just about anything that leaves a covered property to go offsite—is that equipment listed? And if so, is it properly covered?

“We want to make sure that, one, we’re covering any property that needs insurance. And two, that any property that’s on the insurance schedules should be there,” said Kinsey. “If they no longer have it, if they’ve sold it, if they’ve salvaged it, or if they’ve trashed it, we want to make sure they’re no longer paying for it.”

Next up is the vehicles. As a municipality’s private passenger cars and light pickup trucks age, their value (as determined by Kelley Blue Book) will diminish. Eventually, it will no longer be financially wise to keep that vehicle’s physical damage coverage.

Review your vehicles to see if this is the case. When in doubt, speak with a League representative, who can walk you through all relevant information and help determine a cost-effective course of action.

Finally, there are two steps municipalities can take to greatly mitigate problems that may arise as a result of future damages.

First, it is wise to videotape the inside of your properties. By walking through the buildings and recording what is in each room, you are creating a physical file that will be immensely useful should that building ever suffer a fire, flood, or other damaging event.

“It’s definitely something we recommend, at least every couple of years,” said NCLM Director of Underwriting Michael Pittman.

Lastly, ensure that all of your files are safe, orderly, and backed up digitally. While perhaps not as fear-provoking as a fire or flood, the loss of crucial files can be devastating for a municipality, and it’s worthwhile to take the time to ensure that everything is protected.

Provisional measures such as these, while not likely at the top of a municipality’s to-do list, have tremendous value. When you begin your housekeeping undertaking, remember that the League is always available for guidance and help. NCLM staff has in-depth information and instruction at the ready, and can walk you line-by-line through both your assets and schedules. SC
The mission of Stewart’s Municipal Planning & Mobility team is to strengthen communities by building equitable and resilient solutions and connecting people to place. Stewart’s certified planners and urban design professionals provide support to achieve client’s visions of successful communities across the state of North Carolina. Our planners work with municipalities and counties, focusing on small to mid-sized communities, using a collaborative data-driven and design-oriented approach to project management which results in better plans and stronger communities.

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In each edition of Southern City, the Preferred Partner Spotlight features one of the League’s Preferred Partners, select vendors that have entered into agreements designed to save cities and towns money through bundled purchasing and service arrangements.

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City of Sanford Joins Recycle Right NC Campaign

The City of Sanford has joined the N.C. Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service’s (NCDEACS) “Recycle Right NC” campaign to educate residents about the correct way to recycle household goods.

Recycling is a long-standing method of redirecting waste from landfills; however, many people add items to their carts that aren’t recyclable. This leads to contamination and increased cost. Recycling facilities must spend more time and money sorting out non-recyclables and the results still rarely meet international quality requirements – meaning no buyers.

Knowing what can – and what cannot – be recycled is vital to maintaining the City of Sanford’s recycling program and aiding North Carolina’s thriving recycling industry. Follow these guidelines for efficient, effective recycling:

• Empty cans, bottles, paper, and cardboard are recyclable.
• Do not bag your recyclables.
• Do not recycle plastic bags, cords, hoses, and other string-like items.
• Do not recycle hazardous items such as batteries, needles, sharp objects, and food residue.
• Do not recycle Styrofoam cups and containers.
• When in doubt, throw it out!

“We are thrilled to join forces with our neighbors to present a coordinated Recycle Right NC message,” says Mel Gilles, Recycling Education and Outreach Specialist for NCDEACS. “While there are subtle differences in what can be accepted in local recycling programs, we all have much more in common and hope that consistent messaging across the state will reduce confusion.”

City Employees Smash All Records for United Way Campaign

Wilson city employees plan to give more than $130,000 next year to United Way of Wilson County, the largest single-year increase in the city’s history.

The city’s United Way campaign concluded last week with a total of $131,333 in cash donations and pledges. The total was nearly $18,000, or more than 15 percent, over its 2018 tally.

Deputy City Manager Harry Tyson said he was “extremely proud” of how city employees responded to this year’s campaign.

“We are a Pacesetter company and we have gotten this year off to a great start,” said Tyson, who is chairing the countywide United Way campaign.

Judi Thurston, executive director of the United Way, said, “The City of Wilson always runs one of the most fun and exciting campaigns. They truly understand our mission.”

The campaign was co-chaired by Bernadette Whitley, Wilson Energy, and Matt Shaw, city communications, and enacted by a team of city employees. The signup period was July 29-Aug. 9, highlighted by a city talent show luncheon on July 31.

The city has conducted United Way campaigns annually since 1960. Its totals have been over $100,000 now for five years in a row.
Community Celebrates Opening of Newton Splash Pad

Newton celebrated the opening of its new splash pad during a dedication ceremony at the Newton Recreation Center on Oct. 3.

The Newton Splash Pad was funded as part of a generous bequest from Sue Jones to enhance recreational opportunities in Newton. In addition to the splash pad, funds from the estate of Sue Jones have been used to construct the Frank & Sue Jones Amphitheatre in Downtown Newton; install lighting on the ballfields at Jacob Fork Park; and develop Chadwick Park, Little Brooke Park, and the disc golf course at Jacob Fork Park. The city remains deeply grateful to Sue Jones, whose desire to expand recreation facilities and programming for the citizens of Newton made the Newton Splash Pad a reality.

The splash pad will be open to the public 12-6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 4; 12-6 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 5; and 12-6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6. After that, the city will determine whether to open the splash pad depending on daily temperatures. Admission to the splash pad is free. The splash pad is located at 23 South Brady Ave. To find out whether the splash pad is open, please call the Newton Recreation Center at 828-695-4317.

“We are truly fortunate to be able to unveil the Newton Splash Pad thanks to the generosity of Sue Jones,” Newton Mayor Anne P. Jordan said. “I am confident our community, and especially our children, will enjoy this new destination in Downtown Newton for many years to come.”

A Partnership To Build Awareness of Human Trafficking
"What’s Local Government got to do with it?"

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Southern City 4TH QUARTER 2019 41
The Newton Splash Pad is 5,900 square feet in total area with a wet deck of 3,626 square feet. The splash pad’s 24 water features spray 234 gallons of water per minute. The water features are based on nautical themes including ships, anchors, hooks, cannons, and friendly sea serpents. The wet deck is surrounded by picnic tables and benches, a soft turf area that serves as a cooler walking surface, and two canopies with built-in UV protection that provide shade and comfort to all visitors. Runoff water is collected and treated in an environmentally friendly process that significantly reduces the overall amount of water the splash pad requires. A rubberized mat will be installed on the wet deck prior to the reopening of the splash pad in the spring of 2020.

Designers went to great lengths to make sure the Newton Splash Pad is easily accessible to as many people as possible. The entire splash pad area is enclosed by a decorative fence and was constructed to be easily navigable by adults and children who have special mobility needs. Picnic table seating is available for people who use wheelchairs. The “discovery stream”—the first of its kind installed in North Carolina—is specifically designed to encourage children who have special needs to enjoy the splash pad.

Smart City Kiosks Coming to Downtown Greensboro

Smart City Media will soon begin installing 11 new, smart city kiosks throughout downtown Greensboro. The kiosks, which look like large-scale smart phones, feature timely information relating to nearby restaurants, retail, events and public transportation. The kiosks also provide free Wi-Fi hot spots.

The kiosks aim to engage and connect the community and are free to the City with Smart City Media selling digital advertising to cover the cost.

The Local Elected Leaders Academy offers programs, workshops, and courses designed to instill needed leadership skills in today’s municipal and county elected officials. Participants will learn how to set and achieve strategic goals, strengthen existing bonds, and facilitate new connections as elected officials.

UPCOMING COURSES

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**Strategic Planning for Local Government Officials**  
January 9, 2020 • Wilmington

Thank you to Prudential for their support of training for elected officials.
Sick of Flooding, Mayors Head to Iowa  
continued from page 29

government need to come together with private stakeholders, like farmers and industry, to put mutual value in concept-proven solutions. “You start off with the possibilities,” said Saffo. “This is where we would like to go. This is what we need to do. And you’ve got to have an example. I think Iowa has created it.”

It’s not all about Iowa, though. Weber said the point is to apply the knowledge wherever it’s needed, and to share data from other localities that might help. In that spirit, the Iowa team intends to travel to North Carolina for more perspective.

“This is a great thing for all of us,” Saffo said. “Building those relationships is critical. Without that relationship... it becomes a contentious issue.”

He added that he would love to see a North Carolina version of the Iowa Flood Center run by one of the universities here. Useful information coming out of the Flood Center and the Iowa Watershed Approach is available online. Because the URL is lengthy, Weber says the quickest way to find it is by googling “Iowa Watershed Approach,” as it’s usually the first result. SC

Ernest Ball Award  
continued from page 34

assistant general counsel. He’s better known for his decades with the City of Charlotte, where among other things he ensured a smooth handling of the 2012 Democratic National Convention, which received no lawsuits, as well as the legal preparation for the 2020 Republican National Convention.

The Past Presidents Group of the Association of Municipal Attorneys established the award in 1991 (naming it after Ball in 1994). According to the book “75 Years of Service: A History of the North Carolina League of Municipalities” by Jack Aulis, Ball joined the League in the transformative early 1960s and became its general counsel. He was described by former Washington Mayor A. Thomas Stewart as one of the “brains that get(s) the job done.”

The multi-day conference in Asheville gathered municipal attorneys and colleagues from around the state for updates on state law, case outcomes, and other professional development. SC

Water & Wastewater  
continued from page 32

stakeholders. Costs have many components that include not only paying for today’s operation and maintenance, but also for yesterday’s deferred projects and tomorrow’s infrastructure modernization. SC

Francine Durso, PE, a Senior Project Manager in the Division of Water Infrastructure, serves as the staff liaison to the State Water Infrastructure Authority. Her experience includes over 30 years in the field of water and wastewater facility planning and design, with more than 20 years in private engineering practice.

Kim Colson, PE, is the Director of the Division of Water Infrastructure within North Carolina’s Department of Environmental Quality, and serves as Chair of the State Water Infrastructure Authority. His water resources experience spans more than 28 years, including work with a privately-owned public utility and many years with North Carolina’s environmental agency.
By the time that you read this column, North Carolina towns and cities will have gone through another round of municipal elections. In addition to choosing leaders of their communities, many local voters will have decided local ballot referenda.

In the case of some towns, like the Town of Cary’s approval of a transportation bond in October, voters will be deciding whether to borrow money for specific capital projects.

But in some places, those elections will not be limited to municipal voters and municipal ballot measures. Mecklenburg and Cleveland are among a handful of counties where county voters will consider approval of an additional quarter-cent sales tax. These referenda are permitted under legislation approved in 2007 by the General Assembly that allowed counties to increase their local sales tax rates by a quarter penny. While the ballot cannot stipulate how the additional revenue will be spent, typically county commissioners lay out their plans by resolution as they put the issue before voters.

In both of the Mecklenburg and Cleveland County cases, municipalities in those counties were set to benefit slightly from the measures if voters approved them. Nonetheless, that county commissioners in those counties designated a small portion of the revenue for municipalities does not change the fact that voters living within municipal corporate limits—though they are likely to be the biggest part of the electorate deciding these ballot issues—cannot decide to adopt their own municipal-only sales tax.

And so, the main revenue source that municipalities have control over is the municipal property tax.

As we’ve argued before on these pages, this is far from an ideal tax structure, as most economists would conclude that a diverse tax and revenue structure is best to promote equity among all taxpayers, as well as help smooth out revenue year to year. Putting such pressure on the property tax base in some municipalities also can discourage economic growth, as businesses look for alternatives locations with lower tax rates.

Of course, NCLM has advocated for the North Carolina General Assembly to approve a municipal-only sales tax for several years to address to create a more equitable system.

Our current Municipal Advocacy Goals includes the following: “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.”

Legislator leaders have not been all that sympathetic to municipalities’ need for more revenue flexibility, but there are signs that is changing.

Earlier this year, the House—by a wide, bipartisan margin—approved a local bill that would have allowed Roanoke Rapids to put before voters a ballot measure seeking a 1-cent municipal-only sales tax within its corporate limits. Six similar bills were filed, by Republicans and Democrats alike.

As we face a rapidly changing world in which municipalities have increasing and diverse service needs, let’s hope these developments portend a wider recognition by state policymakers that our cities and towns also require more diverse revenue streams. SC
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Lumberton’s chief of police, Michael M., will tell anyone he meets that joining LGFCU nearly 35 years ago was one of the best decisions he’s ever made. That’s because LGFCU has done a lot for him over the years.

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