Roanoke Rapids Mayor Pro Tem

Carl Ferebee

A Winding Path to Leadership

Municipalities’ Resourcefulness Shines in Florence Response

Beyond Hurricane Florence: City Vision and the League
In hometowns across North Carolina, our members help others prepare, respond and recover when disaster strikes.

Hometown Care was created to help them.

The heroic efforts of local government employees across southeastern North Carolina responding to Hurricane Florence and assisting the victims of the storm captured the attention of the entire nation. Often missing from news stories is that these same employees – first responders, utility workers, emergency management officials and others – are suffering significant losses affecting their own homes and belongings.

That’s where Hometown Care comes in – the League wants to help our member city and town employees affected by Hurricanes Florence and Michael – and future disasters. The Hometown Care Disaster Relief Fund, established by the NCLM Local Leadership Foundation, is here to take care of the municipal employees who work so hard to take care of all of us.

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Redeveloped Downtown Property Attracts New Business to Gastonia
*Here We Grow* feature story

NCLM Leadership Foundation Establishes Hometown Care Disaster Assistance Effort
Program assists municipal workers suffering losses

League Insurance Pools Ready in the Storm
Dozens of pool members affected by Florence, Michael

NCLM-WRAL TechWire Partnership Begins New Phase for *Here We Grow*
Finding common purpose to elevate the municipal economic development story

Scott, Brown Chosen to Lead Mayors Group
In its second year, Mayors Association continues to emphasize idea-sharing

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Southern City

Southern City is a publication for and about North Carolina municipalities, published bimonthly by the North Carolina League of Municipalities in partnership with Innovative Publishing, a national publisher of association and corporate magazines.

Volume 68
Number 6
November/December 2018

Executive Director & Publisher:
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www.nclm.org

Southern City (USPS 827-280) is published bimonthly for $25 per year ($2 per year to member municipalities, $1 for single copies) by the North Carolina League of Municipalities
Phone: 919-715-4000

USPS 827-280 Periodicals Postage Paid at Raleigh, NC 27676 and additional mailing locations.

Advertising: For advertising inquiries, please contact Innovative Publishing, 844-423-7272 (toll-free), 888-780-2241 (fax), or advertise@innovativepublishing.com

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As much as all of us wish to never see devastating natural disasters like Hurricane Florence, one thing proven time and time again is how these storms bring out the best in us, creating human connection that would not occur otherwise.

Here in Jacksonville, we recently learned the story of Marine Sgt. Justin Peterson, a Florida native who had been through a few of these storms himself. Having recently bought a boat and learning that the hurricane was bearing down on the North Carolina coast, he prepared by stocking up with MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) and other rescue-related supplies.

He then volunteered to help as a part of an Onslow County search-and-rescue team, taking his boat and supplies to flooded parts of Jacksonville and other areas to help pull people from their homes. In one apartment complex, the water was chest high as he and his team pulled a woman, her two children and their dogs aboard the boat to take them to safety.

Among our own first responders in Jacksonville, these types of rescues were all too commonplace. The city’s Fire and Emergency Services, and our police units, took part in 287 rescues and emergency evacuations. The most dramatic came when 71 people seeking shelter in a local hotel had to be rescued when its walls and roof began collapsing. At the storm’s height, our Center for Public Safety became an emergency shelter, housing about a hundred people. And in the days after, our Citizens Phone Bank handled hundreds of calls and our city employees answered hundreds more social media messages to help residents with assistance.

While much of the clean-up from the storm has now taken place, we have a long way to go when it comes to recovery. About 7 percent of the city’s population continued to be displaced as of early November. Several businesses remain closed. Many streets are showing the effects of heavy erosion from the flooding, with water eating at the substrate. Thirteen city buildings received significant damage.

We know that the local heroes responding to storm and now dealing with its aftermath can be found across North Carolina.

The efforts by municipal workers throughout the state, often without thought to their own losses suffered in the storm, are why the League and its Local Leadership Foundation created the Hometown Care disaster assistance program.

The idea is to help as many municipal employees as possible who suffered uninsured losses due to Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael. The program offers grants of $500 to eligible employees, and while we recognize that amount will not come close to making up for the sacrifices of many of those employees, we hope it can one part of the help that they deserve and that they receive.

While recognizing that there are widespread needs created by this storm, this effort was not undertaken lightly. When it comes to our municipal employees, we believe the League has a unique responsibility to help, that this is about us helping our own. The League itself contributed $25,000 to the Hometown Care effort, and is continuing to seek additional support.

The effort will continue into January, and if you can help, please take time to do so. You can contribute by going to our GoFundMe site at www.gofundme.com/hometown-care-disaster-relief.

Thank you for any contribution to this great cause.

Meanwhile, know that Jacksonville and other communities are resilient, and are pressing on with what is continued on page 42
Great things are happening in Gastonia! In June, The Loving Group, one of the largest and fastest growing landscaping firms in the country, moved administrative offices from Charlotte to a new location: the 132-year-old former Craig & Wilson building in downtown Gastonia. Loft apartments by the Carriage Company occupy the upstairs of the historic building located at 100 W. Main Ave.

The Carriage Company and the City of Gastonia partnered in 2008 for redevelopment of the building utilizing funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Neighborhood Stabilization Program. In 2017, The Loving Group purchased the ground floor of the building from the City of Gastonia, officially moved administrative offices this summer, and plans for expansion with the recent purchase of an adjacent building.

The redevelopment of the former Craig & Wilson building is just one of many success stories in Gastonia. Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau show the city’s population has grown from 47,218 in 1980 to 76,593 in 2017, an increase of more than 62 percent.

From the Carriage Company Lofts and The Loving Group offices in this highly visible location downtown, you can walk to the Gastonia Conference Center, and a variety of unique, locally owned restaurants including Webb Custom Kitchen, recently named one of the country’s most romantic restaurants by Open Table, an online restaurant reservation service with reviews. There’s also the award-winning Cavendish Brewing Co. a few blocks away, hair salons and art studios, and a boutique hotel under construction in the historic Lawyers Building nearby.

Green spaces abound. Across the street from the Lawyers Building is Center City Park with Ghillie Dhu – a kinetic metal sculpture, a popular spot for lunch-time visits or just lounging. Next to the park, the Merit Building’s outside wall features five large panels for changing art displays. If it’s a Friday night in the summertime you can hear live music from free concerts at the nearby outdoor Rotary Pavilion. You can walk or ride your bike to the Catawba/Avon Creeks Greenway or Carolina Thread Trail.

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Roanoke Rapids Mayor Pro Tem Carl Ferebee attentive at a meeting of the city council. Photo credit: Ben Brown
Roanoke Rapids Mayor Pro Tem Carl Ferebee

A Winding Path to Leadership

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

Roanoke Rapids Mayor Pro Tem Carl Ferebee admits he’s not your “gift for gab” style of politician. Rather, “I’m kind of a working politician. What’s the need? Okay, let’s get it done,” he said. “That’s kind of me.”

That doesn’t mean that he is absent from the community conversation, particularly not for the city he’s publicly served for three decades, a period that’s seen dramatic industrial transition. Working off its past as a vigorous mill town to one positioning itself today as a traveler’s destination, Roanoke Rapids is full of talk about reinvention and possibility that Ferebee laid out for Southern City on a recent visit.

“We’re still trying to make that transition. That’s something we’re all working on,” he said from the municipal office in a downtown mixed with vacant or transitional properties and bright spots -- including a modern pocket-park artfully staged within the shell of an old, main-street building -- that show what revival looks like. The city this year joined 45 others in the state with 2018 accreditation from the N.C. Main Street Program.

But no longer operating are the mills that lured and employed so many of the Halifax County town’s residents. Nor is the JC Penney that brought Ferebee to town in the first place. But with its immediate access from busy Interstate 95 -- reinforcing its travel-stop potential -- historic properties that demand to be photographed, efforts to grow in arts and entertainment, and a multitude of opportunities for outdoor lifestyles, Ferebee is confident the city has plenty of muscle to “get back on the horse.” He said he and civic partners are exploring ways to make the city “some kind of destination, where someone would drive here and stay overnight, rather than totally passing through.”

When Ferebee arrived there in 1979, public office wasn’t yet on this mind. The seeds were, though. Ferebee had transferred to a position at the then-new Roanoke Rapids JC Penney following tenures with the
Ferebee knew it concerned sheets, towels, pillowcases, curtain rods and such, but it wasn't in his experience as a buyer. He said he brought to them his list of options to purchase for the store and told them, "Okay, ladies, pick out what we're going to sell here." They ran their fingers down the pages and pointed out sure-fire sellers as well as items never to bother with. "And it was really successful!" he said. "I thought, 'Man, I look like a genius.' It was successful. But I gave them the credit. I thought, 'You ladies did it.'"

Looking back, the connection to higher public service is clear to Ferebee. "And some of the folks I talk to remember me from those days.... Sometimes I guess you're doing things or helping things in some kind of service area, and you don't really know it," Ferebee said.
He smiled thinking that his leadership roots formed in early grade-school.

“When I was in school, I was a little taller than some kids and the others would always come to me to help them out of a jam,” said Ferebee. “I always helped them out by asking (bullies) that were bothering them to leave them alone.... I had no idea that was some form of politics.”

Still, governmental politics wasn’t a proper interest. He recalled one of his early jobs, in a grocery store, which had a service counter where a local retiree would sit for hours and talk on end about the Watergate scandal. “All day, he would talk about Watergate. Watergate scandal. Watergate this. Watergate that.... And I said, you know what? I’m so sick of hearing about this,” Ferebee recalled with more laughter. “It’s a wonder I ever went into politics.”

But in 1983, he attended his little sister’s college graduation ceremony, where Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of Atlanta, spoke as keynote. “His message was if you are not satisfied with the system, become part of the system and help to make a change,” Ferebee said. “He just impressed me.... It just stuck. Whenever things came about, I’d go back to that. If you don’t like the system, become a part of it to change the system.”

A few years later, having developed interest in local matters like housing and jobs, he found himself serving on municipal committees and gaining admirers for his non-political sincerity. By 1989, he was selected for a seat on the city planning board that he would keep until 1999 (serving as chairman in the last four). That’s when the city council member in his district stepped down, giving Ferebee a popularly backed and uncontested shot at elected office, which he’s held ever since.

“I first ran for better housing, better jobs and economic development,” he said. “My theme now is ‘continuing the challenge.’” Ferebee emphasized that he

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doesn't want a few quick wins on any issue to mark the end of popular work on it, as the small improvements need fuel for the ongoing betterment of the city overall.

"Though many things have gotten better and changed, it is still a lot of work to do in keeping small towns and cities in the forefront and getting our fair-share — undefined — of help from Raleigh and Washington," said Ferebee. "Some politicians may not believe it, but small towns and cities cannot make it alone. We have to become a part of the League, work with our representatives and other local cities to make a difference."

Ferebee and fellow elected officials put a premium on collaboration that includes county commissioners as well, with regular roundtables between the areas governing boards to focus on common ground and draft unified legislative and community goals. They're sent to the legislative delegation, which Ferebee says also maintains a close-working relationship. He called that fortunate, giving Roanoke Rapids and surrounding communities a better chance at thriving than political adversity would allow.

In the same spirit, Ferebee is active within the League of Municipalities, serving on its Board of Directors and as co-chair of the League's Tax and Finance Legislative Action Committee. Additionally, he's treasurer for League affiliate group the North Carolina Black Elected Municipal Officials and a board member with the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Government. He's held numerous other civic roles as well.

While he described his younger self as more of an incidental leader than he was conscious of, part of his mission now is to create that consciousness with the youths of his community today so that Roanoke Rapids can thrive.

"One thing that we need to do is to try and get an interest in government again. I'm 65. After a while, I've got to give my wife some time," he said laughing, adding she was his high-school sweetheart. "I don't see the interest that I think we need in local government to have a progression on it."

He said he's always recruiting, particularly with the minority community that might not see itself adequately portrayed in the political leadership seen on television. "I don't see the interest in (government) for the reason that it should be," Ferebee said, echoing the Maynard Jackson credo.

But right before Southern City concluded its visit to Roanoke Rapids, Ferebee did have a chance to demonstrate his outreach. Sitting in for Mayor Emery Doughtie, Ferebee led a regular meeting of the city council and, as its first order of business, honored a local Girl Scout troop for its work creating a local food pantry. Before applause and amid camera clacking, Ferebee personalized the young girls' interaction with government by stepping down from the council dais, shaking their hands and thanking them for their leadership.

He gave them pins of the city seal. And he told them, keep it up. SC

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Beyond Hurricane Florence: CityVision and the League

By Scott Mooneyham, NCLM Director of Public Affairs

As Hurricane Florence loomed off the North Carolina coast, the North Carolina League of Municipalities made the very difficult decision to postpone CityVision 2018, the organization’s annual conference scheduled for Hickory.

It turned out to be the correct decision, as the devastation that followed meant that many League member cities and towns had the far more important task of hurricane response and recovery ahead of them. (See coverage of the storm in Municipalities’ Resourcefulness Shines in Florence Response on page 13 and in NCLM President Michael Lazzara’s Speaking Out column on page 4.)

Still, it was a difficult decision. Municipal officials across the state had made plans to attend; the City of Hickory had made extensive preparations and was ready to act as welcoming host; programming and associated speakers were set to go; and League staff had put in significant preparation for the event.

CityVision is critically important to the League’s larger mission to connect members with one another and with ideas that strengthen and make all towns and cities better places to live for all residents.

In the immediate aftermath of the decision, it was not clear exactly how the League as an organization would proceed with rescheduling. Eventually, though, the direction became clear, and in the days after the storm, the Executive Committee of the League’s Board of Directors made the decision to reschedule and hold the upcoming annual conference May 14-16 in Hickory. The committee members also decided to move forward by holding future annual conferences in the late April/early May timeframe, permanently shifting the time of year.

The initial scheduling decision for next year worked because the time slot was still available for facilities in Hickory, and ensured that the city would still be able to host the event. The decision also aligned with an organization goal of creating a schedule that was a better fit for holding CityVision in cities in eastern North Carolina and along the coast, locations that often have to deal with the threats of such storms during the September/October timeframe.

As League Executive Director Paul Meyer explained to the full NCLM

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Over the course of the past election season, it became clear that the League has been more than on track in its campaign for better state policy that encourages better and more robust broadband access.

In their flyers, in their debates, on their websites and in the materials distributed to their local media outlets, legislative candidates from across the state consistently cited better broadband as a political goal of their candidacies.

That really should not come as a surprise. Those candidates are hearing from their constituents -- residents and business owners -- who understand the need in their communities for either basic residential service where there is none, or high-speed connections to help spur economic activity where only standard connections currently exist.

And those same constituents have been talking to their local elected officials about that need. In turn, locally-elected officials talked with League staff members, helping drive the decision by the League’s Government & Public Affairs team, reached a little more than a year ago, to begin pursuing a strategy of promoting public-private partnerships as a means to address the need for better broadband.

In the last legislative session, that need was acknowledged, though not in the manner that we had hoped. Legislators approved a new $10 million grant program intended to expand internet access. The money is directed to internet service providers and utility cooperatives, and is primarily aimed at bringing basic broadband service to those without it.

It’s a good first step.

It won’t, though, address what needs to be understood as some of the key components of the digital divide in North Carolina: the portions of core business districts in towns across the state that lack the kinds of internet speeds needed to compete in a 21st century economy, and the ability of communities to attract housing growth when areas lack higher speeds and even speeds that meet the federal definition of broadband.

Dig into this aspect of the digital divide just a bit and you come to understand that basic economic principles are at play. The investment dollars of the larger telecom firms are mostly chasing dense populations, where those dollars go further to serve more people, and therefore generate a better return on the investment.

Meanwhile, the gap between speeds offered in those densely populated areas and those offered in many less sparsely populated areas only grows.

That’s why the League has proposed the public-private partnership model as a solution (which, by the way, is working and working well in other parts of the country).

Local governments are already in the business of investing in and maintaining infrastructure, whether it be roads, water or sewer. Their ability to borrow money over longer horizons and for cheaper interest rates makes them a natural fit to work with smaller internet service providers – who would run the business of providing retail service – in these types of partnerships.

As a new legislature prepares to come to town early next year, the League is looking forward to working with legislators and other partners to address this crucial infrastructure gap. That buzz during election season is a clear sign that the people of North Carolina expect policy solutions that lead to better access. SC
Mayor Bill Saffo of Wilmington and a band of fellow local government officials had just left the White House feeling good. They’d met with presidential staffs and federal agency representatives, described to them all they’d been through with Hurricane Florence, identified urgent needs still on the ground since the mid-September storm and highlighted demand for new resilience as torn-up communities like Wilmington rebuild.

Backed by coverage from media outlets nationally, their trip to Washington was crucial visibility for local government in the recovery from one of the worst natural disasters in North Carolina history.

“First of all, from my perspective, is the recovery assistance for housing,” Mayor Saffo said in a phone interview while driving back from the nation’s capital to North Carolina on Oct. 30.

Municipalities’ Resourcefulness Shines in Florence Response

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

He told Southern City, as he’d just told the federal audience, that the historic storm rendered several apartment complexes in his city uninhabitable, leaving hundreds and hundreds of Wilmingtonians with limited or, in some cases, no clear option for shelter.

And there were so many other concerns to relay, not the least of them being how the storm flooded Wilmington so badly that the mainland city literally became an island for days. There was no vehicular access.

The federal staffers had asked questions and taken notes in discussions that shined light on potential funding resources for the many storm-hit localities and strengthened bonds for communication like this to continue.

At the table with peers including mayors Douglas Medlin of Surf City and Dana Outlaw of New Bern, Saffo and company kept the local-level story alive and in context, with faces and voices.
“We’re going to need their help,” said Mayor Saffo of higher governmental agencies, “and we’re going to need it for a while.”

At the state level, in October, the General Assembly approved more than $850 million for North Carolina’s recovery, with a portion immediately available and the remainder in reserves for needs ahead.

Meanwhile, local governments have been tapping fund balances for quick debris cleanup and reflecting on in-house resourcefulness that saved property and lives as the hurricane shoved through.

‘On the Fly’

A preliminary estimate of Florence-related damage across North Carolina totaled near $17 billion, according to Gov. Roy Cooper’s office in October as he and state legislators worked on state relief funding that eventually included allocations for home rebuilding and for local governments to rebuild their own damaged facilities.

Mayor Medlin of Surf City, who shared the D.C. car-ride with Mayor Saffo, said over the phone that the storm sogged his town hall so badly they have no choice but to call it a loss and rebuild it in a different location outside of the flood zone. “We hope we get some government help with that,” Mayor Medlin said.
While the coordination for local relief from higher governments is necessary for such an uncommonly costly hurricane, there’s no downplaying the forethought, resourcefulness and on-the-spot bravery from municipal leaders and staffers who stood through the storm.

In Boiling Spring Lakes, which saw severe road washouts under floodwaters and dam breaks, city hall was manned with about 20 employees during the storm. They traded 12-hour shifts and slept in office space there just to be on hand when needed.

“A lot of it was on the fly,” said City Manager Jeff Repp.

When the city’s internet and phone services went down, staffers used their own cell phones as mobile hotspots to be able to post important information and storm updates online for the benefit of anyone able to see them. The city’s IT vendor also helped re-route phone calls to the police department and city hall directly to the cell phones of Repp and the city’s police chief, meaning they were fielding all incoming calls personally. Many were from evacuated residents asking for checkups on their properties.

“You understand it, but it’s difficult to tell people we don’t have the manpower to go out and see if their roof is still there and so on,” Repp said. Field responses were reserved for emergencies including numerous water rescues.

In Jacksonville, Facebook became a vital tool for pumping out announcements and interacting with residents, so much that it’s likely to become a more central component of emergency communications planning.

“We’re rethinking about how we’re going to be able to do that in the future,” said Jacksonville Assistant City Manager and communications head Glenn Hargett.

“People are just looking anywhere they can for information,” added Deputy City Manager Ron Massey.

“That’s where I think cities have to pay attention.”

National news outlets certainly did, with major network reporters camped out in Jacksonville broadcasting
or tweeting out imagery (though often sensationaly, Massey said, making it all the more important for local government to be a leader in disseminating information that might influence the public).

Whether on the Weather Channel, NBC News, Fox News or other major outlets, it was hard to miss the sight of New Bern, spotlighted for its extent of damage. Behind the scenes, though, local government staffers were hard at work even as Florence wrecked their homes and belongings. “They sacrificed their own personal lives for the betterment of society,” said Mayor Outlaw, noting that the city’s employees and elected officials were out in the storm connecting residents to medical help and shelters.

“You could make a major movie that would be a megahit about the performance of the staff of the City of New Bern during this tragic period of time,” Mayor Outlaw said, adding his amazement that no one in the city was killed.
Cone of Uncertainty

No local government played it casually. As Florence slowly approached as a super-powerful hurricane, municipalities and county officials in- and outside of the cone of uncertainty were in groups discussing emergency operations, staff roles and contingencies.

A coastal police chief for 14 years and a state trooper prior, Mayor J.V. Dove of Southport has put in his time with ugly hurricanes – but never grows comfortable.

“There’s always concern whenever a storm comes in like this,” he said of Florence, which pressed into his waterfront town Sept. 14. There’s no doubt that the level of preparation Mayor Dove’s city and partner agencies strove for improved outcomes for residents and business owners, who received mandatory evacuation orders from local officials as responders set up emergency operations and followed plans discussed in meetings ahead of Florence’s arrival.

“We’re so fortunate that our people are versed in this,” Mayor Outlaw, referring to evacuation orders that some residents brushed off. “They think you’re sensationalizing it and you’re too emotional.”

But Florence, which made landfall here as a Category 1 storm – the “weakest” category, quite deceptively – moved at a pace so catastrophically and unprecedentedly slow that it had even the most seasoned responders taking notice.

Residents don’t have to look far into the past, however, for a frame of reference. It was only two years ago that Hurricane Matthew barreled over and devastated so many North Carolina communities, it too having made its U.S. landfall as a Category 1.

“To have two 500-year storms hit us in 24 months … is it going to happen again next year? Year after?” Mayor Saffo posed.

Florence, in turn, may have the public regarding Atlantic storms differently in the years to come.

“It was a good learning experience for all of us,” Jacksonville’s Massey said. “That’s the closest that I’ve been to all the impact of a hurricane. I’ve rode through hurricanes before but never had one that inflicted some of the damage that we saw. So you learn a lot of lessons, both personally and professionally.”

“You get one of these every 60 years and people just don’t think,” said Mayor Outlaw, referring to evacuation orders that some residents brushed off. “They think you’re sensationalizing it and you’re too emotional.”

Resident and partner agencies strove for improved outcomes for residents and business owners, who received mandatory evacuation orders from local officials as responders set up emergency operations and followed plans discussed in meetings ahead of Florence’s arrival.

“We’re so fortunate that our people are versed in this,” Mayor Dove said, adding it’s doubly essential given the mixed experience among the locals with summer storms.

When public officials in North Carolina talk hurricanes, often raised are the points that 1) numerous transplants often lack direct understanding of such monstrous weather and 2) this state hasn’t really seen a steady rhythm of bad landfalls over recent years, and so the “prepare for the worst” advice doesn’t always impress people, even longtime residents. So often, it seems, we make it through just fine, officials observed.

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In the lead up, response and recovery to Hurricane Florence, local government employees were on the front lines assisting victims of the storm. Recognizing that many of those same employees -- while helping their fellow citizens – had become victims and suffered significant losses themselves, the North Carolina League of Municipalities Local Leadership Foundation has established the Hometown Care disaster assistance program.

The program is designed to help those employees of member municipalities who have suffered significant uninsured losses in this storm and other natural disasters.

The goal of the campaign is to help as many municipal employees as possible who were harmed by the storm, as well as create a program that can provide similar assistance in future years. Eligible municipal employees will receive grants of up to $500 to be funded through a $25,000 donation by the League, a fund-raising effort through GoFundMe.com, and other private donations provided to NCLM’s Local Leadership Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization.

NCLM Executive Director Paul Meyer noted that the grants were intended as a gesture to recognize the sacrifices that valuable municipal employees – including first responders, utility workers and all the workers involved in the coordinated efforts required of a such a disaster – make during these times. “We do hope that it helps, that it can be one part of the hometown care they deserve,” Meyer said.

To be eligible, an applicant must be a current employee of a member municipality of the North Carolina League of Municipalities and have suffered a documented uninsured loss. For this round of funding, priority will be given to employees in areas covered under the Hurricanes Florence or Michael federal disaster declaration.

NCLM expects that grants will have begun being awarded by the publication date of this edition of Southern City, and that the campaign will continue through mid-January. NCLM will also be coordinating volunteer efforts in affected cities and towns. Also, please note that we will have disaster-related experts on hand at the Advocacy Goals Conference in Raleigh on Nov. 29 to help advise members regarding recovery efforts.

“We recognize that recovery from disasters the scope of Hurricane Florence and Hurricane Michael will not be easy or quick, but NCLM is dedicated to helping member cities and towns in any way that we can. We thank you for any assistance that you can provide,” said NCLM President Michael Lazzara.

Information about both donating to and seeking assistance from Hometown Care can be found on the NCLM website at www.nclm.org/alerts. You can find the Hometown Care disaster relief fund.

The rescue efforts of Atlantic Beach became a central image in the Hometown Care initiative. Photo and design credits: Town of Atlantic Beach and NCLM

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Holly Springs Has National Role in Delivery-by-Drone Trials

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

The drone hovered over a group of merry spectators aiming their camera phones skyward at the unmanned aircraft. There was no muffling their excitement. These people couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

“Oh my god!” a woman yelled through giggles.

“That is unbelievable, isn’t it?” said a man at her side. “How bizarre is that?”

As the glee swelled, the drone lowered by cable a small package to the group, released it to their hands, and then zizzed away.

Inside the package: an order of sushi, in a meal delivery like no other.

“How bizarre is that?” the man repeated.

This spectacular food order, delivered in Reykjavik, Iceland, was all captured on a smartphone video uploaded this past August by a company called Flytrex, which claims credit for the world’s first urban drone delivery system (in Iceland). Now, the company is working with the Town of Holly Springs to pilot similar happenings in a nationally watched project that could impact the future of interaction between humans and drones in the U.S.

“We would galvanize the town’s brand as far as being cutting-edge, innovative,” Town of Holly Springs Assistant Engineering Director Aaron Levitt said in a press release that announced the one-of-a-kind initiative this past summer.

Overseen by Levitt from the town’s side, the drone trials in Holly Springs, population 37,000, represent a heavily regulated program with state and federal oversight, including that of the Federal Aviation Administration.
For every drone that we’re using, there’s going to be one less vehicle on the streets.”

Aaron Levitt
Town of Holly Springs
Assistant Engineering Director

“For every drone that we’re using, there’s going to be one less vehicle on the streets.”

Aaron Levitt
Town of Holly Springs
Assistant Engineering Director

(FAA), to see how well this food-delivery-by-drone thing performs in a populous community as participants imagine the ramifications and different use-cases that success in Holly Springs could enable.

“The FAA’s initiative signals a palpable shift in the acceptance of drones as the future of on-demand delivery, and we’re proud to be working with them and with Holly Springs to help make this vision take off,” said Yariv Bash, the CEO of Flytrex.

Right now, it’s unfolding within tight FAA restrictions that will hold the flights to daylight hours, within the operator’s line of sight, and away from unwitting people. The three-year program, none of it rushed, could see flight scenarios expand as trials satisfy regulators. Levitt said he hopes to see test delivery flights begin before year’s end, and Bash said he hopes successes show the social, environmental and economic benefits of unmanned airborne dropoffs.

It all came about from a presidential order in late 2017 eyeing the incorporation of drones (a technology not showing any sign of popular decline) in the national airspace with local government involvement. The FAA created the pilot program and sought applications. Levitt pursued it with the blessing of his superiors and later aligned interest with the N.C. Department of Transportation. Holly Springs was one of just a few sites nationally the FAA selected for the flight experiments.

The federal agency stressed the importance of public outreach in the chosen communities, knowing drones often worry people in terms of safety and privacy. Levitt is taking that on to alleviate concerns.

“It’s challenging,” he admitted. “It’s tough to go in front of town council and talk about drones flying over people’s houses and delivering food. It’s a lot of information to swallow.”

But to reassure, he said the drones will not carry cameras, will have redundant power supplies (and parachutes for the unlikelyhood of total failure) and will never stray from regulations.

To put it in context, Levitt told the town council at a recent meeting that we’re at the next major transition point in transportation and access, and we can look to the past for parallels. When automobiles came to be, they weren’t instantly or easily integrated into our lives, he noted, pointing to the “red flag laws” of the time that required a moving car have someone walking ahead of it waving flags to warn pedestrians that a car was coming. That meant cars could only travel at footstep pace – kind of impractical, but a pace society might’ve needed for initial comfort.

“People were concerned about these mysterious, new machines,” Levitt told council. “…Today, the drone industry is operating under similar restrictions to the red flag laws.”

That might be necessary, but also set to change under field tests like Holly Springs.

As of this writing, the town is working with the FAA to get the first phase of operations underway. The plan is to try drone deliveries from at least one restaurant at a popular shopping center in Holly Springs to visitors of a nearby sports park. Signage at the park would inform the visitors of
an app they could download to initiate food orders.

"Kind of like a GrubHub. You go and you find your favorite restaurant or your favorite food that you want to have ordered," Flytrex head of U.S. operations Wes Shover explained.

A drone would deliver the food to a pre-defined location – initially, at one of the far corners of the sports park.

Shover reiterated to the town council how important it is to keep things straightforward and safe, with an engaged public.

"If we don't have the buy-in, then we don't have people ordering," he said.

Considering the known dangers of automobiles (with 40,000 vehicle deaths per year in the U.S., according to the nonprofit National Safety Council), Levitt said drones could be a great thing to usher in.

"For every drone that we're using, there's going to be one less vehicle on the streets," he said.

The Town of Holly Springs, like many municipalities, already employs a drone for government functions. Land surveying, water-tower inspections and disaster assessments are popular uses of drones in local government, with proponents saying it makes such work safer and quicker.

"I think we're always trying to be innovative," said Levitt of Holly Springs. "I think the drone program is really the closest we've been to being the first in the country."

Listen to Episode 56 of the League's podcast, Municipal Equation, for a deeper look at the program and its ramifications. Find episodes at nclm.org/municipalequation. SC
By the time you read this I will have made an official announcement that I’ll be retiring this spring after more than 29 years on the League staff.

I have to admit that I knew very little about municipal law or the inner workings of local government when I came to the League. I am grateful that the League allowed me the opportunity to learn, with guidance from experienced staff members and municipal officials, and the occasional trial by fire (as it turns out, both literally and figuratively). It’s been a rewarding career, with never a dull moment.

I’d like to leave you with a few thoughts and random bits of advice.

1. There is nothing new under the sun, and legislative issues will get recycled year after year. We have to be willing and able to read the tea leaves to know when, or if, compromise is in order. As a veteran of lobbying during the annexation conflicts (and I still have the tire tracks on my back to prove it), I learned that it is incumbent upon us to consider whether we gain anything with an immoveable stance on any issue. There is value in being open-minded and flexible enough to discuss alternatives; otherwise we may win repeated battles but ultimately lose the war.

2. The “key to the city” doesn’t really have to open the town hall. (This is from one of my all-time favorite legal inquiries. You just never know what someone will ask.)

3. No good ever comes from using “reply all.” This lesson is familiar to you if you’ve ever attended the Essentials of Municipal Government or New Mayors Orientation. It’s true. Resist the temptation.

4. The facts matter. If you’re asking for legal guidance, the opinion may change based on facts that you might not have mentioned. If you want solid advice, don’t leave anything out.

5. On a related note, don’t be afraid to consult your city or town attorney. The League and the School of Government can provide guidance and interpretation, but when it gets right down to it, the local attorney is the one who will be defending the municipality’s action if challenged.

6. Have a good plan in place for continuing your own daily operations in the event of a disaster. Sadly, many of you have been dealing with disaster situations in recent weeks, and unexpected events can strike anytime. While the League was able to maintain its operations after the great fire of 2017, this was no thanks to me and my paper-hoarding habits. On a personal level I learned that paper was not my friend in a disaster situation and I have had to reform my ways accordingly.

7. Municipal officials, both elected and staff, are some of the best people I’ve ever known. It’s been my experience that you truly care about your citizens and are doing the best you can, often with limited resources and against all odds, to maintain and improve your communities. You are unsung heroes and deserve more appreciation.

8. Change is a force for good and we need to embrace it. Attorneys are not known for a love of change—we tend to like stability, certainty, and phrases from a dead language. But having seen monumental change within and around the League over these three decades, I’ve come to understand that if we’re standing still there’s a good chance we’re also stagnating. In recent years the

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For Sen. Paul Newton, Attitude Matters

By Ben Brown, NCLM Advocacy Communication Associate

It’s common to hear public officials say elected office chose them – that is, it never crossed their minds to run until community members approached them with the idea. Sen. Paul Newton of Mount Pleasant has a similar story. It’s one that he says he hopes is the result of character traits – selflessness and sacrifice. And he sees those traits – whether observed in hardworking people in the public or private sectors – as their own reward, offering fulfillment far beyond the financial or political.

With that understanding, those fortunate enough to gain the confidence of voters have a duty to stay sincere and remain honest in their work, to serve everyone. In doing so, they can keep that sense of fulfillment.

Finishing out his first term in the General Assembly, Senator Newton says he’s found unexpected passions to explore and that commitments to his district can create rippling benefits to the entire state. And while the jaded may say freshman lawmakers aren’t able to have much impact, it’s worth noting that Senator Newton’s efforts in the General Assembly helped ensure that development impact fees – crucial to support housing and commercial growth – were preserved. Those efforts were part of the reason that he was chosen as one of two recipients of the League’s Community Champion Award in 2017. So far, so good. We checked back in with him for this issue of Southern City.

How would you rate your time in the legislature so far?
It’s been productive. I think by most measures successful. I do think that anyone who is thinking about doing this, should do it with a heart to serve others, because there’s not much in it for you. It’s a lot of time. It’s not a short session and a long session; you work, I would say, every day of every week on legislative affairs and working. It’s not rewarding in the common-sense use of that term. It’s rewarding because you’re serving others. And if you’re successful in helping constituents helping the state be a better place, it’s worth it. I think the analogy with respect to flying a plane that you’ve heard, that 90 percent of it is really boring and it’s the 10 percent of the take-off and landing that are exciting. It’s a little bit of the same way in the legislature, in that it’s only when you’re successful, when you’re accomplishing something, that makes the other 90 percent of the time worth being here for. But the people are great, the issues are great, it’s a continuous learning environment. But if you’re here for your self-interests, you’re going to be very disappointed. If you’re here to serve others, it’s a worthy calling.

Let’s build back up to that. What’s your background, where’d you come from?
I was born in Smithfield, North Carolina. I wasn’t there too long. We
moved then to Eden, North Carolina. My dad was in the textile industry. So, I grew up, until about the age of 10, in Eden. And then my parents divorced and my mom and my sisters and I moved to Greensboro. We struggled financially. My mom could not afford an apartment. And so, a generous friend gave us an old shack, a cabin, to live in for a while. It was one of those places that was so bug-infested that you’d get halfway through a bowl of cereal and there’d be bugs in the bowl. One day, something got in the trash can that was big enough to where my mother shot the trashcan with a shotgun rather than try to figure out what that was in the trash can. It was an interesting time. Lots of stories about that, I can tell you. Matter of fact, the backyard had the prototype of the swinging bridge from Grandfather Mountain. The designer and engineer who built that actually did a small prototype in the backyard. By the time we were there, boards were missing, and we used to run across it regardless to a little pond that had so many snakes that the owner would go out and just shoot the heads of snakes as they swam across the water. So, it was interesting as a young boy to observe all that. After four years, at the age of 14, I moved back to live with my dad. I told my mom that I loved her, but I felt like, being a boy, I ought to grow up with a dad, and so I went back to Eden at that point. Graduated from Morehead High School in Eden. Went to Chapel Hill undergrad, where I got my BS in business administration, then went on to law school in Chapel Hill. Went to New Mexico for five years to practice law and then came back to North Carolina in 1990. Became a lawyer for Duke Power Company. Served in various roles in the legal department until 2008, and then became senior vice president of strategy, rates, wholesale customers, commodities and analytics. And then, two-and-a-half years before my retirement in 2015, I became the state president for Duke Energy and did retire in September of 2015 after 25 years with Duke, 30 years in the workforce. Enjoyed three glorious months of retirement, and then my predecessor (in the legislature, former senator) Fletcher Hartsell, decided really at the 11th hour not to run for office, and so some folks contacted me and asked if I would consider running. I did that. It’s an example to me of the power of the personal ask…. It was true for me, for people that I respected asking me to do this. And that’s how I got involved. I’m done with my first term and running again for a second term.

**What inspired you to pursue a career in law?**

The fact that every day would be different. It would be a new challenge every day. My wife’s got more of a CPA’s mentality and likes to repeat things. Funny, we went to see an estate lawyer
years ago to create a will and that sort of thing. As we were leaving the office, she said, “If I were ever a lawyer, that’s the kind of lawyer I would want to be,” because that lawyer had checklists, very if-this-then-that. As I was going through the checklist, I was thinking how horrible it must be to be a trust and estates lawyer. (Laughter.) It just shows how different we are.... I liked the fact that every day was new, every day had a new challenge, and that’s not unlike the General Assembly. You can come here with no game plan and there are an infinite number of problems to solve.

Or you can come here with a game plan and have that spun around in a second.

That’s exactly right. Exactly.

What do you find yourself drawn to here in terms of projects or causes?

I would answer that in two ways. One, my background forces me into energy issues and forces me into legal issues. My experience makes me well suited to grapple with those problems. But what I find is that the problems draw you in, so it's really kind of, whatever the issue is that needs to be solved is going to get your attention. Last biennium, as you know, it was really the impact-fee issue that captured my attention, because I knew that needed to be solved for both parties and for the state. And we did that.

Having held past positions of high responsibility with Duke and so on, had public office already crossed your mind before the community asked you?

No, it had not crossed my mind as something in terms of what I thought was attractive or something I would or should pursue. I had certainly worked in the environment, in that I had visited legislators from time to time. I had certainly testified before and represented the company before the North Carolina Utilities Commission. If you think of it broadly, as the Legislature sets the policy for energy issues and the Utilities Commission effects the policy for energy issues, I had seen that dynamic, that spectrum, from policy to affecting the issue. And that’s a similar template for really anything we do here in terms of setting policy. So, I had been exposed to the environment (and) I feel comfortable in this world.... So far, I feel like I’m navigating it pretty well, but the key to that is integrity, and if you’re honest with people and they can trust you, you will get things done. If you’re not trustworthy, then you’re not going to be successful.

What’s something you didn’t anticipate before you entered the Senate?

I have really enjoyed the camaraderie among legislators, both sides of the aisle. I feel like I have established good relationships with Republicans and Democrats. You only had to observe the speeches on the floor of the Senate as people were announcing their retirements to really understand how deeply the commitment to this office runs, for people who do commit a good part of their lives to serving.
the community in this way. I would say education is a specific issue that I’m not seeking to get immersed in, but it immerses you. Education is so important to a well-functioning state.... It’s not necessarily a natural fit -- we home-educated our children -- but I keenly appreciate how important it is for all our families, all our parents, all our kids, that we have an excellent public education system. I am a fan of choice for parents. I don’t think the way to improve our public education is by closing charter schools. I think there are best practices and excellent practices we can learn from one another. So again, we’re not where we need to be with public education on a number of levels, but it’s certainly (a topic) that has captured my attention.

**What issues do local officials in your district bring to you?**

The majority of those communications have been around funding new school construction in a Tier 3 county. There just aren’t that many tools in the toolkit for Tier 3 counties. I think the perception is that Tier 3 counties can take care of themselves, but the strain on the budgets constructing schools to accommodate growth is very real.... They’ve got to have tools to do that.... Don’t get me wrong: I’d rather be in a high-growth county than one that’s losing population. So, it’s a good problem to have but a problem nonetheless.

**Solving something like that speaks to the need for good communication between you and the local officials in your district, making sure you’re all on the same page. What are your thoughts here?**

I would encourage any legislator to be on a first-name basis with every mayor and as many city council members of every city and every county commissioner if possible so that they are comfortable picking up the phone and giving you a call. Sometimes it’s just venting about a problem; other times it’s an ask. Nobody has all the answers on these things. Sometimes it takes a few of us getting our heads together to try to solve these problems. But I believe those municipal and county leaders, if they know you and can call you by your first name, we’re going to be much more effective as a team representing the citizens of our districts.

**What do you want to accomplish either for your district or state as a whole in your time here as a legislator?**

What I want to accomplish is to deliver results that improve the quality of life in my district and for the state. I want to look back on my tenure, whether it’s two years or 22 years, and say I served people with excellence. I’m just a firm believer that regardless of socioeconomic background, regardless of life’s circumstances, you can have a rich life if you serve other people. And that may take many, many different forms. You can do it in the private sector.... for and with the employees who work with you. In the public sector, its by serving the constituents of Cabarrus and Union counties. My only goal is to serve with excellence and integrity. I want people to be proud of the effort -- and the effectiveness -- that I’ve brought as their senator. I feel like I’m a problem solver, and those issues present themselves almost literally every day. And the game plan, as you suggested earlier, you can come in with a concrete game plan, and the only thing that’s certain is it’s going to change, it’s going to move on you.

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We’re Here... when you need us.

For over 30 years, the League has been the expert in North Carolina municipal insurance coverage - in Health, Property & Casualty, and Workers’ Compensation.

Our expert staff will help:
- Determine your coverage needs
- Navigate the claims process
- Provide education & training for staff
- Identify claims trends that drive risk management strategies
- And more.
League Insurance Pools Ready in the Storm

By NCLM Creative Services Strategist Kristin Milam

While Hurricane Florence was swirling in the Atlantic keeping meteorologists busy with predictions of wind speed and spaghetti models, municipal officials along the coast and inland beyond the Triangle were busy prepping their cities and towns for what would be one of the most devastating and wettest storms in the state’s history. In the end, Florence made landfall just south of Wilmington as a Category 1 hurricane, bringing a storm surge upwards of six feet and dumping nearly 36 inches of rain as it slowly moved across the state. Then a few weeks later, another named storm – Hurricane Michael – brought even more rain and tropical storm force winds to the state.

“This has been a unique season with two strong storms,” explained Bryan Leaird, the League’s new Associate Executive Director of Risk Management Services. As the largest insurer of local government agencies in North Carolina, the League’s Property and Casualty Trust was busy preparing in advance of the storms.

“Our staff worked before the storm to prep our phone lines, so we could handle the increased volume and remain accessible even though our own office closed. We also established contact with members prior to the storm,” Leaird said. The League also put its contracted CAT – catastrophe – adjusters on standby, to make sure enough staff was available to help members with their storm claims from Day One.

Much like municipalities statewide must prepare for the unknown, the League’s insurance pools work year-round to ensure that members are always protected with the highest level of insurance coverage and service delivery. The pools carry reinsurance to cover the costs of catastrophic claims – think insurance coverage that insurance companies buy.

“We use flood maps and zones and work with our reinsurers and CAT models to investigate our risk exposure,” explained the League’s Director of Underwriting Michael Pittman. The League is also working through its regular five-year appraisal process where staff assists members...
Preparation is key when it comes to navigating disasters, or as Leaird puts it, "response is only as good as the prior planning." But how should a city or town prepare for a disaster? Business continuity planning can be tricky, and often people plan for a specific disaster and miss the larger issues. Leaird suggests that cities and towns identify the critical functions that the municipality provides and work backwards to determine how you keep those critical functions afloat regardless of what type of disaster comes along.

"It’s better to move away from specific scenarios and move toward preparing for continuity of services – what happens if you lose a facility, critical staff or critical equipment? Consider how you would maintain services without those things," he says. For example, public safety functionality – police, fire and/or EMS services – are critical services that a city provides. Think about how you would maintain those services if there are staff shortages or equipment failures; establishing mutual aid relationships with regional partners might be an example of a way to maintain services.

It’s also important to be knowledgeable about FEMA and understand how your insurance works in relation to any federal assistance. When a disaster occurs, FEMA tends to take immediate priority with county, state and federal agencies requesting quick updates related to damage estimates, disaster declarations and more. Working with all those groups can be daunting.

FEMA is currently offering regional trainings through NC Emergency Management that are specifically related to the recent storm damage and recovery. It’s important to note, however, that FEMA offers regular trainings throughout the year, and Leaird recommends member cities and towns have staff attend at least one FEMA training each year if possible.

Likewise, it’s just as important to begin looking at your own insurance needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. “We want our members to know how important it is to get just one claim into us to start the process,” said Willie Wilson, the League’s Interim Director of Claims. “Once we get that first claim, our adjusters will get out onsite and survey all the other damage. We are different than commercial carriers and even FEMA – the League tries to maximize your claim and get the process started quickly.”

During the recent storms, field staff were proactively reaching out to areas that were known to have sustained damage but hadn’t yet contacted the Property and Casualty Trust.

While hurricanes often gain the most media attention and speculation, the preparation and response to all kinds of disasters share some commonalities, one being that the League is standing by to help our members whenever disaster strikes. We’re here to help from start to finish - from routine risk valuations and appraisals all the way through filing a claim and processing the last claims check. If you have questions about insurance, please contact the League at 919-715-4000 or visit www.nclm.org/insurance.

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NCLM Hurricane Florence Insurance Stats
- 532+ property and inland marine claims submitted
- 81 members affected
- 60+ auto claims
- Property damage caused by flood waters is the most common

with their city or town’s valuations, making sure they are adequately insured.

Workforce Intelligence. It’s HOW we do IT.
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Roughly two years after its initial launch, the North Carolina League of Municipalities and WRAL TechWire have entered into a partnership to enhance our Here We Grow initiative.

As a part of the partnership, TechWire, in association with WRAL Digital Solutions, now hosts the website, which features local, crowdsourced stories from municipalities about their investments and efforts that are promoting economic development. The arrangement is expected to help drive more public traffic to the site, and bring more public awareness to those local efforts.

Both the League and TechWire see the partnership as helping to leverage existing audiences for each, and to pursue common purposes. Since its founding in 2002, WRAL TechWire has been focused on technology and startup news, and earlier this year made a transition from business publication to multimedia brand when it launched its new website and podcast, stopped charging for its content, and expanded its coverage statewide. Doing so, it has recognized the importance of municipal economic development, having already established partnership arrangements with the City of Wilson and the Town of Holly Springs.

“The potential collaboration between the League and TechWire, and the promotion of our member endeavors in the areas of economic development and support of entrepreneurship, is limitless,” said NCLM Director of Public Affairs Scott Mooneyham. “We want to do everything that we can, as an organization representing virtually all cities and towns in the state, to help the public understand the important role that municipalities play in economic development. We also want to be able to explore new innovative avenues to help each member municipality get that message out, particularly as the footprint of some traditional local media outlets has contracted.”

NCLM also sees the partnership as a means of helping promote the organization as a thought leader. The League’s communication team has worked closely with James Amato, Manager of Strategy and Business Development for WRAL TechWire, in the development of the partnership.

“The strength and leadership of its hometowns are central to our belief that North Carolina possesses the downtown West Jefferson is the perfect place for open-air jam sessions. Its downtown is thriving with local business and upbeat mountain character following direct governmental investments in the scene. Photo credit: Town of West Jefferson
The NC League of Municipalities’ Health Benefits Trust is excited to welcome 42 new employer group members for the 2018-19 plan year!

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

We proudly offer employee benefit solutions for:

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

Thank you to our members new and old – We’re Here and looking forward to working with you!
As you read this, you may be starting to reflect on 2018. Whatever your experiences, I think we can all agree it has been quite a journey … especially for those of you who either serve in office or have been recently elected to an office. Serving in political office is not for the faint of heart. It takes determination and passion for your community to run for office. It takes strength and courage to serve. Thank you for choosing to do so.

Whether you have ever considered it or not, as a political leader you hold power that is greater than yourself. As both Voltaire and Peter Parker’s Uncle Ben have reminded us, with great power comes great responsibility. Much of that power is encompassed in the power of words.

Yes, 2018 has me reflecting on the power of words, particularly when coupled with the responsibilities of leadership. We live in a world where words spread with a velocity and volume never before experienced in our lifetimes.

More and more, in a world dominated by social media, people have become accustomed to sharing their thoughts immediately. The immediacy of the internet can be a good thing, as we have seen during the recent storms, giving local municipal officials the ability to communicate quickly and widely with residents, relaying critical and even life-saving information.

These handy smart phones that we spend so much time with also provide us with a world of immediate information, as well as the ability to connect with local first responders when there is a car accident or another life-threatening situation.

But there is the other side of this technology and the immediacy of connection that it brings. Too often, we come to engage in monologues not dialogues. We say things on social media we might never say looking into the eyes of another person. As noted by Jonathan Albright, research director at Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism “[s]ocial media is emboldening people to cross the line and push the envelope on what they are willing to say to provoke and to incite. The problem is clearly expanding.”

So back to reflecting on 2018, and on the new year ahead.

My prayer is that, as leaders in our homes, our workplaces, our places of worship and our communities, we enter into 2019 with a shared purpose: Before we post, tweet, “insta” or whatever new piece of communication technology comes along, we will hit the pause button and ask some simple questions. “Are my words an influence for good or ill? Are they unifying words or dividing words?” “By sharing these words am I embodying the true mandate of all Americans, which is a recognition that ‘all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. That among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness?’”

One of the great things about working at the League is that so many of our local elected officials are unifiers, and the daily work that you do brings people of all political and cultural backgrounds together in common purpose. I know that you will continue spreading that same example in 2019.

Here is wishing all of you peace and prosperity in the year ahead.
Franklin Mayor Bob Scott will lead the North Carolina Mayors Association over the next year, having been selected in October as chair of its Board of Directors.

“It is interesting to see the dynamics of a mayor from a village sitting and talking about problems with a mayor of a huge metropolitan area. We learn that regardless of the size of our towns and cities, we have much to learn from each other,” Mayor Scott said of the organization.

Established in 2017, the N.C. Mayors Association is dedicated to improving life in all of the state’s municipalities by seeking public focus on and finding solutions to critical issues facing the state. It was formed specifically to provide a platform for all of the state’s mayors to work together to address the major goals and challenges of cities and towns. The N.C. Mayors Association is an affiliate organization of the League.

Mayor Scott is among 11 North Carolina mayors serving on the group’s Board of Directors.

He has served on the Franklin Board of Alderman for 10 years. Mayor Scott retired from the Western Carolina University Campus Police Department as executive officer, and before changing careers, was a longtime journalist. He is serving his second term on the North Carolina League of Municipalities Board of Directors.

Also at its October meeting, Bethel Mayor Gloristine Brown was chosen as the organization’s vice-chair, while Kinston Mayor Don Hardy and Angier Mayor Lew Weatherspoon were selected to the group’s Board of Directors.

Mayor Brown has served as mayor of Bethel since 2014 and had previously served on the town council for 14 years prior to becoming mayor. She and Mayor Weatherspoon are also on the NCLM Board of Directors. Both Mayor Hardy and Mayor Weatherspoon are in their first terms as mayor of their respective municipalities.

Scott said that he continues to be impressed with the professional and service backgrounds of the 112 members of the association.

“We have an outstanding group of mayors and the association gives us an opportunity to talk over common goals and problems we encounter in leading our towns and cities across North Carolina,” he said.

Scott replaces Wake Forest Mayor Vivian Jones as chair, who served in the position from the organization’s formation. At that time, Jones noted that the group’s formation provided a great opportunity for more elected officials to work collectively toward creating good government practices across the state.

If you are a mayor of a North Carolina member municipality and are a not a member of the N.C. Mayors Association and would like to join, please contact NCLM Grassroots Initiative and Civic Engagement Associate Will Brooks at wbrooks@nclm.org. SC
The National League of Cities has issued a report to try to help municipal leaders develop resilient local waste management systems in response to new regulations in China that have limited and will eventually ban recycling imports. The report, Rethinking Recycling: How Cities Can Adapt to Evolving Markets, highlights how municipalities can effectively respond to — and perhaps even benefit from — the upcoming Chinese ban.

“In the face of adversity, city leaders have historically been our nation’s problem-solvers,” said Clarence Anthony, CEO and executive director of NLC. “China’s new policy is a wakeup call that we need to think more critically about waste management, and cities now have the opportunity to strengthen domestic markets and chart a sustainable path forward.”

Historically, Chinese demand for materials to feed its manufacturing led it to purchase recyclables from all over the world, driving healthy commodity markets in paper, plastics and more. The rest of the industry relied on these sales, not taxes or fees, to fund their collection operations. But China’s new policy, National Sword, is upending this approach.

The second phase, which will take effect in 2020, will be a total ban on all solid waste imports. This change could potentially diminish markets, cause market fluctuations and reversals, and lower revenues.

The U.S. exports 16 million tons of recycling commodities to China per year. In 2016, these shipments were worth $5.2 billion. With China largely out of the picture, the available supply is overwhelming, but the demand for the supply is relatively low, resulting in depressed markets and lower revenues across the United States, with some areas impacted more severely than others. Although clean commodities are still in high demand, these are not what the markets are currently flooded with. Without China’s demand for lower quality feedstock, the remaining buyers have their pick of abundant, albeit not particularly clean, supply at rock-bottom prices. This means lower revenues for all materials recovery facilities operators, not just the ones previously dependent on China.
Recycling is seen as a crucial service in many communities. Many Americans recognize its importance to fighting climate change, reducing pollution and limiting municipal landfill costs. The domestic recycling industry also accounts for 757,000 stable jobs, $36.6 billion in wages and $6.7 billion in state, local and federal tax revenues. For many cities, this is also a question of equity, as poor people and people of color are disproportionately burdened by waste-contaminated soil and water.

In addition, oceanic plastic contamination has come to the fore as a major international crisis. Inefficient waste management practices have led to eight million metric tons of plastic being dumped in the oceans annually. As a result, there is an international dialogue on how cities can work with the recycling industry and other business partners to keep more plastic out of oceans.

The long-term recommendations for city leaders from the report include:

- Conducting an economic analysis of current management operations.
- Working with contractors.
- Ensuring fees and rates reflect current costs.
- Evaluating local policies and economic incentives.
- Exploring local and unconventional markets.
- Examining asset ownership and considering infrastructure investments.

The report notes that some municipalities are looking to other markets in Asia, though those may also be short-lived as other Asian countries are also putting in place import restrictions on recyclables. But others have found more local markets, and the report highlights how the Solid Waste Authority of Palm Beach County, Fla., has turned to waste-to-energy facilities that incinerate some previously recycled materials to recapture some lost financial values, even if the

For more information, visit [www.mcgillengineers.com](http://www.mcgillengineers.com)
incineration is not the cleanest form of energy production.

The report also looks at efforts to prevent contamination of recycling materials, with efforts to encourage residents to ensure items are recyclable and clean before placing them in the recycling bins, as contaminated materials have hurt the marketability of American recyclables.

Earlier this year, North Carolina media outlets reported on similar efforts here by the state Department of Environmental Quality, and municipalities and counties to better educate residents on acceptable recycling materials. Meanwhile, some local government recycling programs have ceased as a result of the changes in China. And several recycling contractors have indicated that they will ask North Carolina cities to restructure recycling deals due to the market changes.

The NLC report, though, warns that major shifts, such as the outright elimination of previously accepted materials in recycling streams, should not be made hastily. The consumer behavior that contributes to the success of the U.S. recycling system has taken decades to cultivate, and changes can quickly undo years of education and outreach efforts to increase waste diversion. The market continues to rapidly change and evolve, and strategies to manage the issues should be thoughtful, not reactionary.

It also notes that several waste management companies, nonprofits and member associations have developed toolkits for municipalities to use to encourage better recycling practices, and provides links to those programs.

You can find the full report at www.nlc.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/CSAR_Recycling-MAG.pdf. SC
Sanford, Chatham County Extend Sewer Service to Moncure Megasite

At its regularly scheduled meeting on October 16, the Sanford City Council awarded approximately $12 million in construction contracts to extend the City of Sanford’s wastewater collection system to the Moncure Megasite.

Located near the intersection of Old U.S. 1 and U.S. 1, the 2,500-acre North Carolina Certified Site is a cooperative endeavor between the City of Sanford and Chatham County. It is expected to serve as an economic development catalyst that will benefit Chatham, Harnett, Lee, and Wake counties, the central Carolina region, and the state as a whole.

“Working together with the City of Sanford to fully develop the Moncure Megasite builds on both of our strengths,” says Diana Hales, chair of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. Connecting the site to the Big Buffalo Wastewater Treatment is a fundamental component of making it competitive across the state and nation, she says.

The megasite has also benefitted from a $4 million Golden LEAF Foundation grant awarded to the City of Sanford to support sewer infrastructure. The grant was part of the foundation’s Major Site Development Initiative, which aims to make North Carolina megasites more competitive by investing in the infrastructure necessary to appeal to original equipment manufacturers (OEMs).

“With this investment in sewer, the Moncure Megasite will be the most ready and quickest to the market of all sites in the Southeastern United States and the Carolina Core,” asserts Sanford Mayor Chet Mann. “Speed to market is crucial for companies in the 21st century global economy. Having a site that can meet their production timetable without risk to their schedule is essential to landing an OEM,” he says.

The megasite is “the largest potential employment property in the state,” notes James Crawford, former chair of the Chatham County Board of Commissioners. While increased employment will benefit surrounding counties, it also accomplishes Governor Cooper’s and the NC General Assembly’s mutual goals of job creation and tax base expansion. “An OEM locating at the Moncure Megasite would be a game changer for our community,” Mann points out. “We believe this megasite will bring hundreds if not thousands of jobs. It will provide endless opportunities for growth and advancement to our entire region,” he says.

Leveraging our assets for a greater return long term is something we set out to do as part of our Open for Business Agenda in Sanford, Mann
The City of Hickory’s “Historic Beginnings” mural has officially been added to the Appalachian Mural Trail. “Historic Beginnings” is a 35 by 25-foot mural, located at 234 Union Square in Downtown Hickory, which depicts the City of Hickory’s historic beginnings. The mural features images of Piedmont Wagon, the Southern Railroad, Hickory Tavern, the Huffry Hotel, 1918 Union Square, and Hickory Manufacturing Company. In addition to historic scenes of early industries, four pioneers who helped build Hickory’s strong economic and community-spirited foundation are included. These faces are Alex A. Shuford, J. Alfred Moretz, Lester Clark Gifford, and Edmund Thomas Moore, Sr.

A project of the City of Hickory’s Public Art Commission (PAC), the mural painting was completed in September 2006 by Oregon artist Roger Cooke (1941-2012). During his lifetime, Cooke was sometimes called the “Johnny Appleseed of small town murals,” having produced more than 60 historic murals across the country.

Hickory residents and visitors are encouraged to snap a selfie with the mural in Downtown Hickory and upload it to the Appalachian Mural Trail’s selfie page at https://www.muraltrail.com/cgi-bin/hickory-historic-mural/. Individuals who do so will receive a free t-shirt saying “I hiked the Appalachian Mural Trail” and featuring images of murals.

The Appalachian Mural Trail was established in 2017 by co-founders, Doreyl Ammons Cain and her husband Jerry Cain. To learn more about the Appalachian Mural Trail, please visit https://www.muraltrail.com/. Information about Hickory’s “Historic Beginnings” mural can be found at https://www.muraltrail.com/cgi-bin/hickory-historic-mural/.

The Public Art Commission, an advisory group to the Hickory City Council, provides a forum for integrating public art into the public space, helps create a visual sense of the community, and provides leadership in implementing a public art program for Hickory. 

Hickory’s “Historic Beginnings” mural is now a part of the Appalachian Mural Trail. Photo credit: City of Hickory
**Sen. Newton continued from page 29**

With that level of commitment being a legislator, how do you make time away for family, hobbies, time to yourself?

For me, it’s simple. I have a farm, and there’s not much I enjoy more than getting a cup of coffee, putting my two dogs on the Polaris, and crossing the street to the farm. They get out, they run in the field. I drink my coffee, sit in the field, watch them play. And then we’ll go sit for a while, I’ll catch up on some reading. And that is just -- I’m a morning person, and I just really, really love that. I’m also helping my wife be successful with her wedding venue. After having homeschooled four kids, I knew she needed another challenge. (Laughter.) And so, our farm is pretty enough to be a wedding venue, and so I am the free labor for her. I am often working before the sun comes up till midnight, certainly on wedding days, to make sure brides are happy, their families are happy, and more importantly my wife is happy....

**Having a role of responsibility in a wedding can be frazzling, in just making sure all goes well and those high-stakes moments go as planned....**

I think back to Hurricane Matthew. We had a wedding when Hurricane Matthew was coming through. I changed clothes three times that day. I was on parking-lot duty and I was just thinking, “There’s no way 150 people are going to come to an outdoor wedding in a hurricane.” I’ll never forget, an elderly lady came by, dropped her window and she said, “You know, rain is a sign of blessing from God.” With a big smile on her face. And I want you to know 162 people came to a wedding that was supposed to be 150 people, in the middle of a hurricane. So, attitude matters. Attitude is everything. That’s certainly true for weddings. And it’s true for serving others. You can think about the sacrifices, or you can think about what needs to be accomplished. **SC**

**NCLM-WRAL continued from page 33**

strongest value proposition of any state in America, and we value being your herald. Partnering with the League is our promise to leverage the best of what we do and ‘why’ to help our hometowns share their unique value through great storytelling in ways that matter and move the needle in the digital age,” said Amato.

Here We Grow now hosts stories of economic and homegrown success from more than 50 municipalities in the state. Through this partnership, we will continue to both enhance our existing efforts to promote these efforts, as well as find new, innovative ways to do the same.

You can find Techwire at www.wraltechwire.com, and Here We Grow at https://herewegrownc.org. **SC**

**Speaking Out continued from page 4**

important. Here, we recently continued our tradition of hosting the annual Beirut Observance on Oct. 23, observing the sacrifice and loss of life by Camp Lejeune Marines in 1983. And we will press on with rebuilding and recovery in the days ahead. **SC**
**Beyond Hurricane Florence  continued from page 11**

Board of Directors in October, "I cannot tell you how many times we have narrowly avoided this exact scenario when storms veered away or only brushed the coast."

As a part of those changes, the decision also was made to extend the current terms of the League’s officers and those board members whose terms were set to expire, as the terms typical end and new board members and officers are elected and sworn into office at conference. Given the limited ability to bring as many municipal representatives together for any other event, that decision too seemed the logical course to take, and the organization was fortunate that the current officers and board members were willing to extend their service.

Hurricane Florence and the remnants of Hurricane Michael were obviously devastating events for many towns and cities across the state, and the League recognizes that the disruption caused to the organization and our annual conference were minor in comparison. But from the perspective of the organization, a silver lining to the storms may be that we have a conference schedule that better aligns to the needs of more of our members.

The League looks forward to keeping the commitment to bring this event, and all of its important educational and networking components, to Hickory next spring. And we look forward to hopefully bringing future conferences to those areas damaged by Florence as they emerge from its aftermath with new purpose and hope. SC

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**Legal Eagles  continued from page 25**

League has charted a strategic direction that I believe will well serve both the organization and the membership in anticipating, responding to, and embracing change.

I’ll leave knowing that the League is in good hands. Longtime staff member John Phelps will be taking over as General Counsel, and appellate expert Gregg Schwitzgebel will continue to provide service to municipal attorneys in our amicus and technical assistance program. We’ll also be introducing you to some excellent new staff members who will be joining the legal department as well.

My thanks to the League leadership for your trust and to my many colleagues past and present for your friendship, collaboration, and wise counsel. Finally, my sincere thanks to all of you in the municipal family for giving me the chance to assist you, enriching my time here, and always keeping me on my toes. I look forward to hearing good news about you, your communities, and the League in the future. SC
Taking the Field

Being Responsive to Our Members, in Storms and in Change

By Paul Meyer
NCLM Executive Director

As it became apparent that Hurricane Florence would not be a near-miss for North Carolina, I had the unenviable task of convening a remote meeting of the League’s Board of Directors Executive Committee to decide what to do about our pending annual conference, CityVision 2018, scheduled for Hickory just a week later.

The committee’s decision was far from easy, but it turned out to be the correct one. Postponing the conference – despite all the work that had gone into it by League staff and by City of Hickory staff – really was the only viable option. As the emailed letter that I and NCLM President Michael Lazzara sent to League members at the time stated, we had to act in the collective interest of the entire federation of cities and towns that make up the League.

“Although parts of the state may avoid storm damage, as a federation of cities and towns, we are all in this together and so will all be working as one to address the damage when it passes,” we wrote in that communication.

At the time, we were less than certain how and when we would reschedule the conference, but we were determined to do so. We view the conference as crucial when it comes to the League’s mission of connecting one another in common purpose and in sharing the kinds of best practices that can make North Carolina’s cities and towns individually and collectively stronger, helping you to better serve your residents.

The direction that we ultimately agreed to proceed with, and which worked for the City of Hickory, was to reschedule CityVision for 2019 at the same location on May 14-16. The facilities were available on those dates, but what we also saw was how rescheduling then would allow us to shift to that timeframe – late April and early May – permanently moving forward.

And doing so would create a better fit for all municipalities in the state, helping us to avoid hurricane season in the future and more confidently schedule this event in other cities in eastern North Carolina.

Clearly, what the League has gone through related to this storm is nothing compared to the trauma, the struggle and the response of member cities and towns in the areas hardest hit by Florence, as well as those that suffered subsequently in Hurricane Michael.

That said, we hope that our own actions – regarding conference, in the information that we have relayed to help members in their hurricane response efforts, our setting up of an “information room” of experts at our Advocacy Goals Conference to continue to assist in that recovery, and our Hometown Care assistance grants for municipal employees – shows that we are an organization that is responsive to our members’ needs.

It is in that same spirit of being responsive in a changing world with shifting demands that we have created our Municipal Operations Consultants program, helping municipalities assess and address financial challenges; offered up more diverse health insurance programs that recognize the different needs of cities and towns; established dynamic and robust communications platforms to educate members and the broader public.

We are dedicated to continuing that responsiveness as change continues to press upon us, whether it comes in the form of a devastating storm or the economic and demographic shifts that are reshaping our state. SC
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