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PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

INSIDE

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TWO COVER STORIES SHOW HOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CAN BUILD TRUST, VALUE, AND BETTER GOVERNMENT.

ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT WORLDWIDE

ICMA

PM
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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June 2013 | Vol. 95 No.5

PRELIMINARY GUIDE TO ICMA'S 2013 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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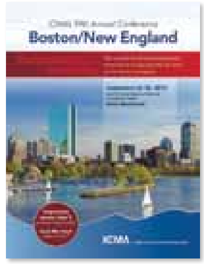

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BY MARTHA PEREGO

DEFINING THIS ERA'S POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

Input from the frontlines

This spring, ICMA launched a discussion with members to get their perspectives on what political neutrality means for professionals working in local government in this era. As the defining bedrock principle for the profession, it's a worthy place to start what is designed to be a structured dialogue of the entire ICMA Code of Ethics.

It's certainly an intellectually challenging place to start! But why not start here? As ICMA's Executive Director Bob O'Neill has noted, "Political neutrality is a principle that goes to the heart of the profession. It's a distinctive characteristic that defines both how we are viewed and how we see ourselves."

A Look Back

The original drafters of the ICMA Code of Ethics in 1924 defined the profession's commitment to political neutrality straightforwardly: "No city manager should take an active part in politics." By 1938 when the code underwent its first change, that statement disappeared entirely.

The only reference to politics at all was added to the statement defining the role of the manager in the policy process: "The city manager is in no sense a political leader. In order that policy may be intelligent and effective, he provides the council with information and advice, but he encourages positive decisions on policy by the council instead of passive acceptance of his recommendations."

Every era views principles through the lens of their experience. Looking back, it may be odd to see a core value placed aside. On the other hand, perhaps the members drafting this revision wanted to emphasize another key characteristic of a professional manager: a source of unbiased information and advice on policy matters.

A statement about the profession's commitment to stay out of politics doesn't resurface in the code until 1972, in what became the first edition of Tenet 7: "Refrain from participation in the election of the members of his employing legislative body, and from all partisan political activities which would impair his performance as a professional administrator."

In 1998, the members voted to change Tenet 7 to the version in place today: "Refrain from all political activities which undermine public confidence in professional administrators. Refrain from participation in the election of the members of the employing legislative body."

The New Era

In the recent dialogue, more than one member challenged the assumption that a new era is sufficient reason to reexamine the meaning of political neutrality for the profession. After all, politics is still politics.

But while the principle remains solid from the perspective of some members, the terrain has shifted. Campaign disclosure requirements, accessibility to data on the web, social media, and the number of polarizing issues up for consideration are just some of the factors affecting today's political arena. For the profession, it may be a classic example of what author Jim Collins noted in his conversation with the profession: a situation where the principles endure but the practices may need to change.

PM PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments worldwide in the pursuit of excellence in local governance.

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Input from the Frontlines

Four consistent themes emerged in the dialogue: local politics, national politics, family engagement in political activity, and issue advocacy.

There was widespread consensus that engaging in campaign politics where you work is a violation of the principle of political neutrality. And, from a career perspective, not smart strategy. The standards outlined in the code help members frame those difficult conversations with elected officials, avoid hot spots, and even fend off unwanted requests for campaign donations.

On the national front, members expressed opinions across the spectrum about whether it was okay to support candidates for office. Some see a clear line between local and national elections. To those members, the ban on presidential candidate donations seems too restrictive.

Others, noting the widespread access to campaign donor rolls and polarized politics, supported the across-the-board ban on campaigning for candidates.

Dealing with family members who want to engage in politics, especially at the local level, is a grey area.

The ICMA code doesn't govern the conduct of family members. But there are implications for members serving as the manager or assistant when their family decides to support a local candidate, run for office, or get involved in issues.

And how do you address the use of social media by your children? Or your spouse as it relates to engaging in politics? The general advice was to have the conversation upfront to talk about the implications, potential tradeoffs, and practical approaches.

On the subject of issue advocacy, there was widespread agreement that more dialogue and guidance are needed. Here are some notable comments:

- Issues have become very partisan and divisive.
- It's hard to do anything even on the perimeter of the political arena without being perceived as political.
- Public issues intersect our personal and professional lives. Even the organizations we belong to and support have the potential to be problematic. Whoever imagined that being a Boy Scout would be a source of controversy?
- Local government professionals have both a right and a responsibility to voice positions on human and civil rights issues.
- We cannot be silent on issues because it's the very reason we entered public service in the first place: to make a difference.

Let the dialogue continue! PM

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CONTRIBUTIONS UPDATE

The April 2013 issue of *PM* magazine included an article that featured the names of individuals who donated to the Fund for Professional Management and the *Life, Well Run* campaign during the 2012 calendar year. The names of eight individuals were inadvertently omitted, and ICMA wants to take this opportunity to thank them for their contributions. The individual donations include:

$500 to $999
Daniel W. Fitzpatrick

$250 to $499
Craig R. Rapp

$100 to $249
Ronald C. Bowman
David E. Moran
Richard T. Reed

Up to $99
Ron Dowell
Kimberly Greer
Paul M. Ziehler

WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT INTERVIEW QUESTION YOU ASK WHEN HIRING STAFF (AND WHY)?

ELIZABETH (LYNNE) LADNER, ICMA-CM
City Administrator
Hiawatha, Kansas
cityadministrator@cityofhiawatha.org

My most important question: Why do you want to work for the city of Hiawatha? Working in the public sector takes a passion for working not only with people but for people. I am looking for employees who seek to do more than earn a paycheck because they also want to help people.

Every position reflects on the character and values of the governing body. Each employee represents the culture of the community and may be the first or only person whom a visitor or new resident sees when they are evaluating whether they want to stay or return.

So for me, understanding why candidates want to work for the city is the most important question because it reveals if they have the heart of a public servant.

JACQUES DUBE
City Manager
Moncton, NB
Canada
jacques.dube@moncton.ca

I like to investigate and then ask a question because the candidate's response allows me to gather information about the person based on a real-life example of an initiative he or she found important to an organization: "Tell us about the most significant change initiative you implemented and for which you were responsible. Tell us what role you played in it, what made it challenging. What were the results?"

The candidate's response also provides insight into what the candidate considers an achievement. All of us encounter barriers when we are implementing change and this question can reveal a candidate's drive to succeed as well as the problem-solving approach.

You can then assess whether the candidate's style will fit into your organization. You can also sense a candidate's energy level, drive, and influencing skills, which are all important competencies for leadership roles in local government today.

KAY LOVE, ICMA-CM
City Administrator
Roswell, Georgia
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The most important question that I ask in an interview is why the person is specifically interested in working for the city of Roswell. The answer provides valuable insight about candidates as potential representatives of the city.

It tells me if they are simply looking for a paycheck or if they are on a career path. It gives me an idea of what they know about the city, the community, and how much preparation they did for the interview.

The answer also helps me know if they will be a good fit with other employees. During the course of my career, I have made some great hires, and I have made some not-so-great hires. In every instance, it boiled down to how well the person "fit" in the organization.

JOSEPH GALL, ICMA-CM
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I have a number of consistent questions that I usually ask during an interview process, including "Where do you see yourself professionally in five years?" Responses to this question help me understand what a candidate thinks about his or her career and how the current opportunity fits into those plans.

But the question I think is the most important to ask is, "Do you have any questions for me about the position or the organization?" This question is usually asked toward the end of the interview process. The questions that candidates then ask in response help me understand the research they have done in preparation for the interview.

In addition, I strongly believe that an interview is a two-way process—as much as I am interviewing candidates to determine if they are a good match for our organization, candidates should also be interviewing me to determine whether our organization is a good match for them. PM

1

CROWDSOURCING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

How about using crowdsourcing to raise funds for sustainability initiatives in your community?

icma.org/crowdsourcing

2

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES

Communities Putting Prevention to Work

Local health departments that received Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and were successful in their project implementation share strategies that contribute to success and sustainability.

icma.org/cppw_grants

3

CITYLINKS PARTNERSHIP CREATES LASTING BONDS

A baseball tournament in San Miguelito, Panama, honored a key participant in an international ICMA CityLinks partnership. Read about the Jerry Babcock Cup, named for the former director of the Pinellas County, Florida, Sheriff's Police Athletic League.

icma.org/baseball

4

LOCAL AND STATE WORKFORCE FACTS

Here are research highlights on the current structure of local and state government workforces.

icma.org/workforces2013

FIRST, THE RESIDENTS

TWO COVER STORIES SHOW HOW CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CAN BUILD TRUST, VALUE, AND BETTER GOVERNMENT.

COVER STORIES

FIRST, THE RESIDENTS

The Time for Transparency Is Now

Use every tool possible to enhance your community's value to residents

By Kevin Lahner, ICMA-CM

As this article was being written, the nation had just endured another negative political campaign cycle. An estimated $6 billion in mostly negative advertising designed to drum up fear and anger against one side or the other was spent during the 2012 political campaigns.

Congress's approval rating was at 21 percent in October 2012, and the president was thrilled to see his approval rating reach 50 percent. Similar, though slightly better, statistics can be found when rating the functions of state governmental bodies.

In this context, it is clear that Americans in general are fed up with the current political climate. The data is available through frequent public polling and media reports. Article after article cites the current political environment in Washington as a drag on our national economy. Unfortunately, many of us are seeing this anger directed at national political leaders trickle down to local political climates.

Political activists from both sides of the spectrum see the opportunity to influence decisions at a local level and demonstrate their political principles to their friends and neighbors. Tea Party Republicans are running for city and county boards demanding more fiscal responsibility, cuts in benefits, and reduced regulations. Labor activists running locally are seeking exactly the opposite. In this highly cynical and politically charged environment, it can make managing a city or county extremely difficult.

Many of us are seeing increases in public information requests, more political grandstanding at council meetings, conspiratorial letters to the editor, and inflammatory Facebook and blog posts. Some of this comes with the territory of the profession, but managers throughout the country are reporting these types of activities coming at a frenetic pace and with more vitriol than ever before.

Time for a New Approach

It is tempting to take the "duck and cover" approach when faced with this type of climate: Simply let the politicians fight it out and dutifully implement the policy decisions enacted by this new breed of political leaders. This may, however, be just the opportunity to do the opposite.

Instead of trying to duck the local political meltdown, managers may be best served by diving into discussions; opening up their organizations to inspections; and providing clear, concise, and understandable information to the residents they serve. In accordance with ICMA's code of ethics, we should not endorse one side or the other; however we can, and I would argue we should, use every tool possible to demonstrate our value to residents and other stakeholders.

As the public increasingly distrusts our national leaders, it is the perfect time to build trust with the local community and re-establish the value that we in the profession bring to communities.

Engage in Social Media

There are several ways to promote community engagement with a focus on transparency. Cities and counties throughout the country are leveraging new technologies to inform, educate, and bring new voices into the policy discussions. While there is still some hand-wringing about opening the door for criticism and providing forums for skeptics on a local Facebook page, if your local government is not leveraging these new tools, you are missing a huge opportunity.

Yes, there is some risk involved, but the long-term benefits of education, information sharing, and opportunity to connect with residents who would never set foot inside a city hall or county building clearly outweigh the risk.

"If you are not doing this yourself, someone is going to do it for you," says Andy Pedersen, a vice president of ICMA (International City/County Management Association) and village administrator, Bayside, Wisconsin.

As Pedersen points out, you can help shape and control the messaging about your community, or you can leave it up to others who will start their own blogs, Facebook pages, and Twitter accounts to discuss the actions your community takes. It is important to note here, that rolling out these tools does take careful thought and should be driven by the policies and direction of elected officials.

Managing a Facebook page can tie up some resources, and takes some time by staff to manage. It would, for example, be important that a posting from a resident providing a pointed criticism or misinformation be responded to quickly online and with the appropriate amount of tact. Sometimes, these things cannot be left up to techno-wizards.

Encourage Resident Involvement

In addition to leveraging technology, communities need to devote more time to opening up their operations and seeking input from their residents about policy choices, resource allocations, and revenue constraints. These efforts include such things as budget workshops, town hall meetings on planning issues, and citizen academies.

While the resources and time involved can be steep, the payback in terms of outreach, information gathering, and local perspective can be enormous. Recently,

TAKEAWAYS

› The current political climate makes it imperative for local government managers to use every tool possible to increase the transparency of their organizations.

› Leveraging such technology and more traditional tools as workshops and citizens academies should be included in a strategic transparency plan.

› Evaluating an organization's risk tolerance and engaging a governing board in these discussions is an important element of any transparency program.

Starting down the path to greater government transparency can be difficult. Organizations and governing bodies have different levels of risk tolerance, and it is important to not get in front of elected officials.

the city I manage implemented a citizen budget partners workshop program, where local residents not affiliated with any existing boards or commissions received an orientation and a series of budget presentations highlighting policy choices.

The feedback we received was enlightening for councilmembers and many of the items shared at these meetings were incorporated into our budget and newly adopted strategic plan. At one meeting, one of the participants said: “I came in very skeptical of how this government was run. I am leaving amazed at how you guys do what you do.” It took considerable willpower to keep the staff members in the room from standing up and cheering.

Again, careful thought must be put into how these sessions are constructed and implemented. Research shows that for most constituent groups, these meetings are the most successful if held in the evenings, if food is served, and if time limits are adhered to by the participants and staff.

It is also important to note residents do not want to feel like they are being steered into certain decisions nor do they appreciate meetings designed specifically with a predetermined end result in mind. This is sometimes difficult to do, especially if you think a particular outcome is the right way to go.

In the most successful workshops and interactions, elected officials, city manager, and staff members check their egos at the door. As the Davenport Institute’s Pete Petersen recently described at an ICMA conference workshop, one extremely important element of these types of workshops is that the staff and elected officials are listening and learning, not standing in front of the room holding court and answering questions.

More Tools for Transparency

Other successful transparency tools that are emerging in local governments include such things as performance dashboards, good examples of which can be found in places like Williamsburg, Virginia, and Grafton, Wisconsin. The most important thing that these types of dashboards do is answer the age-old question, “What am I getting for my tax dollar?”

Data presented in an understandable and visually pleasing way goes a long way to answering this value question. It also provides clear and concise information for the local media, which can sometimes lead to a positive story about what a manager is doing with resources, or how the most recent cuts in state aid are being handled. Compared with the doom-and-gloom scenarios presented in late 2012 regarding the nation’s “fiscal cliff,” the contrasts can be striking.

Going further, the city of Austin, Texas, posts an “Online e-Checkbook” that details nearly every expenditure the city makes. The system also allows residents to start online discussions on particular expenditures or departmental spending. Doug Matthews, chief communications director for Austin, indicated that as one might expect, the city’s department directors did worry somewhat that pushing all their financial data out to the public would open up the city to public criticism.

“As we are pushing more and more open data, that is one of the worries,” Matthews says. “However, what we said was if you are doing things right, there shouldn’t be an issue there.”

The Austin experience has certainly been more positive than negative; members of the public have actually identified gaps in data and informed city staff. It also leads to increased trust and confidence in city operations.

Plan Your Transparency Program

Some might be tempted to jump in with both feet and throw up a Facebook page and start tweeting away and call it a transparency program. Some careful thought and consideration, however, should be taken into account when it comes to these items. Here are six things to keep in mind:

1. Formulate a transparency plan based upon your available resources and the risk tolerance of your organization.
2. Make sure the governing body sets the tone for transparency initiatives and policies.
3. Develop a realistic budget for these activities.
4. Make sure your leadership team is on board and ready to contribute to the program.
5. Assign the right person to lead your transparency initiative.
6. Commit to the program as part of your long-term management plan.

Starting down the path to greater government transparency can be difficult. Organizations and governing bodies have different levels of risk tolerance, and it is important to not get in front of elected officials. It may also take some time and effort by the manager to formulate cogent arguments about why moving in this direction is a good thing.

Department heads also can sometimes get nervous about opening up their operations to outside examination and scrutiny. These factors, however, should not stop us as managers from taking this opportunity to demonstrate our value and hopefully re-establish trust in our local levels of government. PM

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FIRST, THE RESIDENTS

6 Practical Reminders for Leading Policy Implementation

SMALL-CITY CASE STUDY OFFERS LESSONS LEARNED

By Matthew Fairholm and Taylor Gronau

It is good to remind ourselves that local government administrators are often put into a difficult position when councils, elected officials, residents, and courts interact during the making and implementing of local public policy. Our common forms of local government give definitive decision making to elected executives and legislators.

Residents are involved through the voting, referenda, or initiative processes as well as increasingly through interactions with the courts. Public administrators, however, find themselves squarely in the middle of these activities of democracy without any formal standing to make final public-policy decisions. While their influence is real and powerful during the process of policy making, it is in reality only persuasive, not definitive.

At the end of the day, recognizing the integration of the legislative, executive, judicial, and residential elements of local policy making, and how public administrators interact with those elements, will improve the content as well as the process of making collective decisions in local contexts. Managers who commit to that collective process will be more successful in bringing communities together and in navigating the demands of direct democracy efforts.

Policy making at the local level has become even more complicated with the increasing use of direct-democracy mechanisms (i.e., initiatives, referendums, recalls) where residents inject themselves personally, rather than through their elected representatives, into the policy process. The courts, too, have never been absent from the policy process, but they have begun to play a more active role in local activities.

Managers must know how to recognize the causes and interests at play within potential conflicts and be able to encourage, design, and implement processes and relationships that resolve the conflicts without jeopardizing efficient, productive, and equitable delivery of services.

These issues are highlighted by the difficulties surrounding the paving of a short stretch of road in a small rural city. The case illustrates how residents, legislators, professional administrators, neighbors, and judges interact to influence the course taken by local government.

From this case, we glean lessons on the many actors involved in policy making and how managers may be able to exert appropriate and more effective influence.

Different Players, Different Interests

Among the items prioritized for city action and implementation was the improvement of a previously unpaved, unimproved half-mile section of road connecting a city truck route with a county thruway. The city council, city management, and local courts interacted in conjunction with direct resident policy involvement that included meetings, referenda, special elections, and court cases.

The combination of road location, state regulations, engineering requirements, and aesthetic concerns caused the cost of the improvement project to be relatively high. Some people were concerned about the cost, the need to condemn portions of a bluff with beautiful vistas of the surrounding area owned by private residents, and potential lighting pollution and other aesthetic considerations. Controversy, complaints, and conflict emerged.

The plan for the road dated back 40 years; however, little formal documentation existed regarding these plans, which caused the courts to eventually play a key role. Thirty years ago, the city and state cooperated in the design, engineering, and financing of the road.

Other priorities then became more important and this particular stretch of road was left on the plans but placed on the back burner, forgotten by many. When the time came to finally build the road, the city council approved the funding and contracted for construction in what it believed were administrative actions.

The city, however, had changed during this 40-year period. Political and professional management were different and a general feeling of distrust, stagnation, and tension developed over time in the city.

Relatively little had been done to involve or inform the public regarding the project's implementation. Discussions in council and planning commission meetings and a few local news articles on the street project amounted to the entire public-information campaign.

When the project started to take shape and landowners finally realized that some of their bluff property would be needed for the road improvement right-of-way, residents began to question the project. Although concerns about property rights and lighting pollution fueled some of the complaints, other concerns—whether real or imagined—about how the city hindered and discouraged resident involvement were the real fuel that kept the issue burning.

Residents filed their first referendum to stop the road improvement project, citing lighting pollution as the main reason. The vote never came to pass as the city attorney decided that the reason for circulating the lighting issue had

As discussions of social capital, direct democracy, and civic engagement increase in the public sphere, public administration must take its role in facilitating public discourse seriously.

previously been resolved by administrative action, which was the addition of an add-alternate for lighting (a change to the original plans that costs more but in this case would resolve concerns). Such action cannot, by law, be referred. The decision also cited that time already had expired to file a petition.

After the referendum was denied, the council, upon advice from city management staff, approved the decision to condemn areas designated as road right-of-ways. Residents, however, circulated another petition to halt the project citing particular concerns with the condemnation procedures. The petition was filed, accepted, and the city scheduled an election regarding the condemnation procedures. The vote, however, was delayed by another court action.

Residents took the council's decision not to accept the first referendum to court. A subsequent ruling directed the city to hold a special election to vote on whether or not the alternate decision made by the city should be approved.

Residents eventually voted on both issues brought by the two referendum petitions. The results validated the city's decisions and plans, and the road was finally paved. The courts remained involved in the process to oversee a mediation process between the city and local landowner.

Mistrust, poor relationships, and tension continue to characterize the political environment to this day. All told, the project took 40 years from conception to completion, with the last four years delayed by various resident-initiated elections and court actions.

Lessons Learned

Local government managers often find themselves faced with complex policy implementation projects that are further complicated by previous decisions of resident commissions, elected officials, direct-democracy efforts, and courts that are contrary to decisions of professional management.

Harmonizing efficiency with democracy becomes a real balancing act for administrators, especially at the local level. Did the project in this example need to take as long as it did? Did it need to be as contentious as it was?

Here are six lessons learned that begin to help answer these questions.

1. No matter how efficient we may wish government to be, it isn't. Managers need to remember that no matter how much emphasis the profession and the public places on our efficient running of government, our system is inevitably inefficient as the three branches of government interact. Although they are a part of the executive branch, public administrators must recognize their pivotal position in balancing the multiple interests and power sources at play so that something gets done in the running of the day-to-day activities of local government. Efficiency is the field's mantra; inefficiency is the system's legacy.

2. Professional planning is no substitute for a self-interested or aggrieved public. Although public administrators pride themselves on professional planning skills, those skills become less important when residents see themselves harmed by those plans and call their elected representative.

Hiding behind strategic plans and professionally prepared budgets is not useful when councilmembers are up in arms due to a riled public. Astute managers, however, will involve the public in creative and substantive ways in the planning process to alleviate potential hindrances to implementation.

3. No matter how right a city's decision may be, it may still be wrong. While professional planning and rational decision making is a mainstay in public administration, the public interest is not bound by it.

As active players in the word of governance, residents are not held to the same rational standards as bureaucrats. Perhaps, neither are players in the other three branches, with the possible exception of the judiciary.

Despite the fact that decisions make good sense, save money, meet the need, save time, even fulfill certain community standards, public decisions are political decisions. Local administrators must become accustomed to the political context in which decisions are made; rationality is not enough.

4. Sometimes the minority rules in local government. Our system of checks and balances between branches and our tradition of civic engagement is designed to protect minority interests. At least, that is how it is supposed to work. Two main issues arise for local administrators.

First, they must create processes that allow minority interests to surface even in the face of powerful political majorities. Second, they need to realize that sometimes political majorities aren't powerful at all. Rather, the community clout is held by only a few.

The majority of political clout isn't always in the hands of the numerical majority. The small-city case discussed in this article is a prime example of how minority interests can suspend community decisions.

5. When push comes to shove, the judicial branch usually shoves the hardest. Since the days of U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall, the courts have been able to flex their collective muscle in deciding issues in the public interest. Increasingly, local administrators need to understand the dynamics of legal recourses to community policy making.

The case illustrates how the courts can create a community standard about policy decision making, even though the legislative or executive branches believe they are acting appropriately (and legally). By declaring some issues as referable rather than administrative in nature, the court influenced the course of policy making and implementation.

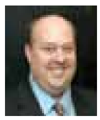
A natural reluctance to push things in the courts due to constraints of time, money, and political will may give the courts significant impact on local policy making. As residents become more aware of options to influence policy that involve the courts, administrators need to create processes that involve residents and decrease the chance of courts getting involved at all.

6. If you think you have involved the public enough, you haven't. The most crucial lesson is that managers must involve the public in their day-to-day activities and that whatever involvement they promote is not enough. Managers must not only involve the public, but also remind them frequently of their previous involvement, keeping the public moving forward on respective projects.

As discussions of social capital, direct democracy, and civic engagement increase in the public sphere, public administration must take its role in facilitating public discourse seriously. It may become the critical component of public administration in the future as it balances the branches of government and the citizenry in the policy-making and implementation processes.

At the end of the day, recognizing the integration of the legislative, executive, judicial, and resident elements of local policy making, and how public administrators interact with those elements, will improve the content as well as the process of making collective decisions in local contexts. Is there a formula for ensuring policy responsiveness and policy acceptance?

Perhaps a partial answer for managers is to recognize that the job requires of them a firm grounding in the foundations of our constitutional system and recognition of the inevitable political context of their jobs. PM

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TAKEAWAYS

› Professional efforts of staff help define an issue, enable policy leaders to formulate solutions, and may lead to community improvement.

› Strong staff analysis that stands on its own can promote transparency and bring diverse voices together to a common solution.

› The foundation of leadership and positive change is often the professional staff, who prepare the analysis and report the results to decision makers.

Getting Good Outcomes

How staff analysis and policy leadership won community support for a tax increase

By Jason Stilwell, ICMA-CM

Beginning with the economic downturn in 2008, Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, began shedding services due to rising costs and lower revenue. In 2012, with successive years of reductions, its residents wanted to know what could be done to restore at least a portion of the service levels the city had historically maintained. >>

Detailed and publicly reported staff work provided the analysis to help city councilmembers outline a policy vision. The council's vision culminated with a focused effort to ask voters to raise taxes, which they approved in November 2012 by an overwhelming 75.4 percent.

The recession resulted in service reductions, but these reductions weren't always apparent to residents. Why? Budget numbers, even as revenues began to bounce back, were at nearly the same level as they were prerecession. Residents, of course, wanted to know why service levels continued to suffer and infrastructure continued to deteriorate when revenues were rebounding.

One response was that subversive growth of pension and health care costs was resulting in lower service levels as funds were diverted from front-line service. Also, the cumulative effects of service-level reductions during the downturn were becoming apparent to residents. While annual cuts in service didn't necessarily seem like much, over time they were changing the community character.

Some 5 to 10 percent annual reductions were beginning to make impacts that were obvious to both visitors and long-time residents. Potholes accumulated and deferred maintenance continued to grow while reserve balances decreased. The city was forced to pursue financing that provided payment relief to the detriment of long-term stability.

When residents asked for answers, the council accepted the leadership challenge. It refocused its annual goals from tactical to strategic. While it kept a list of annual key projects, it also developed a list of four overarching objectives to maintain: community character, long-term vitality, organizational effectiveness, and fiscal stability.

The objectives drove staff to complete an analysis that the council could realistically consider, and it helped councilmembers develop a policy vision and articulate the vision that gained widespread community support. Carmel-by-the-Sea's example serves as a case study of the good outcomes that occur when the community relies on professional staff analysis, has a council that leads strategically, plus rallies around a focused, well-articulated vision of a better future.

A focused process that was also transparent and community-based allowed the city to build an understanding of a future, as well as the ability to determine if it was satisfied with the status quo or a specific alternate future. The city's ability to identify a need, articulate a vision, and develop broad community support involved three phases: analysis and reporting, council policy development, and community support and decision.

Analysis and Reporting

The pronouncement of long-term fiscal stability as one of the council's objectives led staff to complete a series of analyses that supplied a forecast into the city's fiscal future, outlined a comprehensive compilation of capital improvement needs, and proposed a balanced biannual budget. This was an analysis of needs and constraints that focused on service levels, which identified a feasible path forward and permitted expenditures to meet projected revenues.

The focus on service levels allowed the dialogue to center on outcomes rather than workload, staffing, and outputs. The forecast demonstrated that revenues were not going to bounce back to a level that would allow the return of prerecession levels of service. The budget, while balanced, remained status quo.

With successive reductions in service levels, some of the reductions were obvious the year they were imposed; the impacts of others materialized only after several years of cumulative reductions. Recognizing from the fiscal analysis that the future state of the city would require lower service levels, the council's next question then was, "What are the items we can no longer afford to do that the city had historically undertaken?"

When residents began stopping staff and elected leaders to ask why roads were in such poor shape, why certain infrastructure or facilities were looking tired, why code issues were less of a focus than in the past, or why processes were taking longer and weren't meeting the quality they had expected, it was

apparent that they really didn't fully grasp the impacts that successive budget reductions were having on their city.

Council had the analysis of what a balanced budget would look like going forward but not a cumulative list of the reductions that had been necessary to maintain a balanced budget during the recession.

Staff compiled more information on the service-level reductions required to maintain a balanced budget and reported the results to councilmembers at a public hearing. Reductions were presented in five broad categories:

1. Staff reductions and the work no longer being completed due to the reductions.
2. Road maintenance reductions.
3. Reductions of other deferred maintenance, including infrastructure.
4. Increase of financing costs as a result of prior decisions.
5. Reductions of the city's financial reserves.

Staff members also presented an analysis of the negative impact the deferred maintenance reductions would have on the city's budget in future years. Bottom line: It is significantly more expensive to rebuild a deteriorated infrastructure in the future than it is to maintain the infrastructure today.

The impacts were obvious. Not only did residents actually realize that service levels had been reduced and were not going to bounce back, elected leaders also were now informed and able to quantify the enormous impact that service reductions were going to have for future generations.

This is an example of how quality and timely staff work is imperative to help elected officials and community leaders discuss the future of their community.

Council Policy Development

As stated, the analysis and reporting provided councilmembers with data to articulate and quantify the impact of its previous decisions and the path the city was on, including positive results of past actions to balance the budget and the need to make further reductions in future years.

Council proactively made significant budget reductions during the economic slowdown and those cuts helped Carmel-by-the-Sea have a balanced budget going forward. The city also had made significant reforms that were projected to pay future dividends, including the adoption of retirement reforms and other labor concessions.

The council's record was good in that it made necessary budget adjustments during the economic slowdown and took proactive action to share services with neighboring cities and restructure the city's finances going forward. The fact that the council had acted during the downturn made required future reductions more feasible because it had demonstrated leadership in maintaining a balanced budget. This past action provided the credibility to ask the community when enough is enough.

The city was in a position of being able to tout what it had done and move on. Councilmembers held a series of public hearings and workshops to engage the community in the dialogue. The key business and resident groups were targeted for inclusion. Council wanted future discussions to be inclusive with a broad focus of community interest rather than any specific special interest.

Through this process, a path forward was quantified and potential actions to fund future service levels identified. A multipart Service Level Sustainability Plan was developed with five broad need areas: maintaining core services, road system, existing infrastructure, debt refinancing, and maintenance of reserves.

The council debated the dollar amount each of these need areas would require on an annual basis and came to agree on a range for each. The low end of the annual amount of the range would cover basic levels of service and the higher end would return services to historic levels.

The sustainability plan detailed the range and scale of funding required for the long term and the flexibility needed to work with the community in how to get there. Communicating the scale was important as it created context for the potential solutions and supported the dialogue on productive solutions rather than the highly charged but small-dollar ideas.

Also, flexibility of the range of needs enabled the coalition on the council and among the stakeholders to hold firm. The flexibility that the range offered helped the two sides—those who thought the city only needed a few more improvements and those who thought services needed to be returned to higher levels—continue to work together to seek solutions.

Councilmembers focused on various options to fund the Service Level Sustainability Plan, some of which had been tried before and some of which were new to the community. The exercise of both including past ideas and generating new solutions helped maintain inclusivity.

Past ideas for change had a constituency and keeping those ideas on the table kept those constituencies positively involved. Including past ideas coupled with new ideas also demonstrated that no single action would serve as a solution. The solution that would enable Carmel-by-the-Sea to move back toward the level of service the community historically experienced was going to require a variety of components.

Solutions to meet the range of needs identified in the plan gelled into three broad categories to fund future needs by continuing reforms, building on and reinvesting in what makes the community special, and generating new revenue. In a goal statement, elected officials committed to continue retirement reforms, restructure the organization, and increase the use of performance management to demonstrate results.

There was much discussion in council meetings and workshops on how to build on and reinvest in what makes the community special. The focus narrowed to an economic development strategy termed "heads on beds."

The ballot initiative required majority approval to become effective, and the final tally was 75.43 percent of the electorate voting in favor of the sales-tax increase proposal.

The analysis showed overnight visitors contribute more to the local economy than do other components of the city's economy. So the second category of solutions revolved around the overnight visitor, including increasing destination marketing, improving small-conference facilities, and creating a business improvement district to focus on bringing in the overnight visitor.

These two broad categories of solutions still left a gap between the identified solutions and even the low end of the range of needs identified in the sustainability plan so additional revenue was needed to be part of the solution. The size of the gap moved the focus of the revenue discussion from blue-sky ideas to one of augmenting one of the city's three main revenue streams: transient occupancy taxes, sales taxes, and property taxes.

As might be expected, a broad coalition of community stakeholders came into the discussion, focusing on revenue increases that would be least disruptive to their constituencies. After much discussion and compromise, council decided to let voters decide if a sales-tax rate increase was the preferred option for the third category of solutions, generating new revenue.

Community Support and Decision

The Service Level Sustainability Plan helped community groups recognize that the council had charted a path providing stability for future service levels and quality of life. The open process to identify ways of funding the levels led to a three-pronged approach, with voter approval of a sales-tax rate increase being a key component.

The plan demonstrated the city's work, showed the work that still needed to occur, and outlined a multipart plan, with the cornerstone being a sales-tax rate increase. It called for using additional future revenues for five specific areas. The community rallied behind the plan and began telling neighbors and groups to support the effort. Residents, business leaders, and community activists realized the plan presented a possible future that would return their community to something better.

As the community rallied, a broad-based campaign evolved that included business leaders, community groups, resident associations, and elected city leaders. It gathered momentum as word got out.

The campaign took on a focused professional tone. Community leaders realized this was an opportunity to take action. Information was sent by mail, community leaders called voters to ask for support, and residents stood outside the post office and other meeting places to explain the overall vision and to urge fellow residents to support the tax increase. There were multiple living room meetings and small events to discuss the issue and allow community leaders to answer questions.

The focused staff analysis early in the process and the policy leadership of councilmembers led to a well-organized, focused, and structured campaign. No formal opposition developed, and there were no arguments against the initiative on the printed ballot material. Recognizing the work that had been done and the clear vision forward, the leading antitax group even came on board to support the plan.

The ballot initiative required majority approval to become effective, and the final tally was 75.43 percent of the electorate voting in favor of the sales-tax increase proposal. The following week, Standard and Poor's assigned a AA+ rating to the city's debt refinancing.

Morals to Live By

There are multiple conclusions or morals to this case study:

- **Staff analysis matters.** Good staff work can make it easier for elected leaders to take bold action and to have the data that explains their reasoning to a variety of stakeholders.
- **Staff can support the elected leaders in presenting long-term forecasts and projections,** thereby enabling elected officials to articulate a long-term plan that offers long-term solutions.
- **A focused but diverse set of elected officials can come together, thereby enabling different messengers to present the same message.** It required deliberation and flexibility between councilmembers to develop a plan they could unanimously support.
- **It takes a committed effort of community leaders, beyond the council, to reach out to voters** and discuss a plan's virtues with those both inclined for and against the proposal—and to win support.
- **Voters and rating agencies respond well to a well-developed and well-executed plan** that provides long-term solutions to the challenges that local governments face. PM

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BY RONALD THRASHER

STANDING BY UNIFORMED OFFICERS

Why local governments should consider a retired officer policy

Cops and firefighters die. Of more interest may be how and why they lose their lives. Less is known about firefighters, but research indicates that police officers are between three to five times more likely to die by suicide than to be killed in the line of duty. Research further indicates that a vulnerable time for our officers to die by suicide appears to be shortly following retirement.[1]

This article explores possible causes of uniformed personnel suicide and the cultural similarities shared by uniformed employees. It presents little-to-no-cost policies that provide a lifeboat for retiring uniformed personnel and also outlines additional no-cost local services that these individuals may provide following retirement.

The Problem

Nothing approaches the right of passage or the stress of becoming a uniformed officer. The best and brightest are recruited for a local government's uniformed services. The officers come overflowing with altruistic enthusiasm to do good and to help others. They arrive often knowing little more than what they learned from television, movies, or war stories from other officers.

Selection begins with an application exploring every conceivable aspect of their personal and professional lives. Applicants are interrogated with an interview board like no other. They are asked impossible "no-right-answer" questions. Their past experience and their references are questioned. They are required to run, jump, crawl, and carry. When the interviewers are satisfied, they are polygraphed. Then they are sent off to the police academy.

The academy enhances their anxiety. Every routine traffic stop can turn deadly. Every smoke investigation can contain explosives and deadly chemicals. Every ambulance run can involve AIDS, hepatitis, or some other deadly pathogen. Then, eager to get started, they return from the academy presumably ready for an extensive field training officer (FTO) or in-service training program.

Many FTO programs extend training three to four months. Each day, the recruit officer is assigned to a specially trained FTO. Each day, the recruit receives in-the-field training and must pass assignments either by written test, oral examination, or practical demonstration.

At the end of each day, the recruit is evaluated in 20 to 30 different categories and receives two written narratives, one documenting the best thing he or she did that day and the other, the worst. Any subpar evaluation in any single category can send the recruit back to remedial training or result in termination. Upon completion of FTO training, uniformed personnel enter solo service with an abundance of stress and

RETIRED OFFICER POLICIES BECOME LIFEBOATS FOR RETIRING PERSONNEL WHILE ALSO PROVIDING NEEDED SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY.

little training on how to deal with it.

Stress builds with solo activity. Stretches of boredom interrupted by unimaginable excitement creates an emotional roller coaster. The associated adrenalin surge develops physical and emotional dependence. Realizing during times of boredom that an officer momentarily lost his or her hypervigilant readiness increases stress and returns the officer to the adrenalin high of expected stress.

This, combined with experiencing every conceivable type of death, begins to normalize abnormal experience. Is it any wonder that our uniformed officers take their lives?

Those who survive retire. Within an instant, there appears a cake, a few superficial words, and the officer retires. The officer is given his or her service weapon, the firefighter a fire ax. They are led to the door and told that they no longer have access to the building. Lost is the power, the prestige, the symbols of the office, and most importantly, the social support system that kept the officer alive.

Left behind is an individual too old to qualify for another employer's insurance program but one who has a great deal of unappreciated advanced training. Left behind is a possibly depressed uniformed officer lacking a social support system but possessing an acceptance and normalcy of death and a familiar but lethal retirement weapon in his or her hand.

The Solution

Uniformed personnel generally retire with exceptional training at a relatively young age. Some 20 to 30 years of service and experience may dull their youthful enthusiasm; however, their desire for service and need for belonging remain strong. Furthermore, states can decree that retired first responders may be called back to service in emergency situations.

Various states issue the retired police commission a permit allowing a retired police officer to carry a concealed weapon. Federal law now provides that a retired police officer may carry a concealed weapon nationwide, providing he or she annually qualifies (demonstrates shooting and firearms proficiency). Although laws and emergency situations provide justification for a retired officer policy, another beneficiary becomes the officer and the community.

Retired officer policies become lifeboats for retiring personnel while also providing needed services to the community. In essence, such a policy sustains retirees' personal worth and sense of belonging. What is needed is a policy to authorize and direct these retirement activities and needs.

Policy Options

A retired uniform officer policy can provide that an officer may:

- Retain a complete summer and winter uniform. Retired officers may wear their uniform while attending and officiating at weddings, funerals, promotions, graduations, and awards ceremonies; when called to duty; while riding with an on-duty officer; or while performing a department assignment. Retired officers may be buried in their department uniform.
- Retain access to non-sensitive areas of the police/fire building.
- Retain access to the police firing range for practice and qualification pursuant to Chapter 44, Title 18, U.S.C. section 926(D)(1)—the federal retired officer concealed carry law. Firefighters and ambulance officers may also retain access to their respective training facilities.
- Retain access to the department gym and physical training facility.
- Retain the officer's department e-mail account.
- Attend in-service training when available at no cost to the department.

Service Possibilities

The benefits to the city, county, or state of a retired uniformed officer policy are limited only by community needs and administrative imagination. Retired officers can:

- Provide academy or in-service training dependent upon officer credentials and qualifications.
- Provide public presentations to community groups.
- Serve as recruiters at college and university career days and professional conferences.
- Perform such community functions as school crossing guard, school resource officer, and neighborhood watch coordinator.
- Provide supplemental security or first aid at government facilities and functions.
- Serve as a bailiff at the local court.
- Provide support in critical situations, including manning barricades; providing traffic control; or transporting officers, equipment, and food.
- Provide a personal welcome service to a new family providing a packet of community services (this example is from a rural community).
- Form a social network with officers nearing retirement providing information, understanding, and support.

The best and the brightest are recruited from communities for uniformed services. We invest in them the best available training and experience. A retired officer policy provides a partnership between the community and an individual still willing to serve. PM

ENDNOTES

1 Sheehan, D.C. & Warren, J.I. (2001). *Suicide and Law Enforcement* (A compilation of papers submitted to the 1999 Suicide and Law Enforcement Conference at the FBI Academy, Quantico, Virginia, September 1999.). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

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BY ANDREA FOX

WHAT GETS RECOGNIZED, GETS REPEATED

Charlotte's energy visioning gets the star treatment

City staff in Charlotte, North Carolina, knew the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center building was a good candidate for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ENERGY STAR® certification program with its 15 floors and more than 400,000 square feet.

Charlotte's Engineering Property Management Department began collecting energy data on city facilities and initiated an energy management program in 1997. In 2003, the department started implementing energy management projects at the government center building. Over the past 10 years, the building has enjoyed a nearly 30 percent reduction in energy use.

Leading by Example

With the assistance of dedicated maintenance staff, actions taken to achieve energy savings include retro-commissioning or undertaking a systematic process to optimize a building's operation and maintenance; evaluation of heating and air conditioning systems; lighting retrofits; addition of lighting sensors; and installation of variable frequency drives on pumps and fans. Charlotte employees whose offices are in the building are also encouraged to make certain behavioral changes such as unplugging cellphone chargers and microwaves when they aren't being used, signing up to "Adopt-A-Light," or turning off unnecessary common area lights to conserve energy.

The government center functions as a main government plaza, and becoming ENERGY STAR certified provided an opportunity to lead by example and to "get the word out about what we're doing energy-wise," said Laurie Sickles, Charlotte's energy and sustainability coordinator.

Buildings become ENERGY STAR certified by meeting certain eligibility requirements and then applying for the designation. Step one in the annual process is to enter energy use and building information in EPA's ENERGY STAR measurement and tracking tool called Portfolio Manager, and determine if the building achieves a score of 75 or better. Buildings that fall into this category are in the top 25 percent for energy efficiency in the nation compared to similar buildings, and are professionally verified that they meet certain indoor environmental standards.

Charlotte's government center received ENERGY STAR certification in 2009, 2010, and most recently in 2012, when the building scored an impressive 93 points. Staff members are considering applying for ENERGY STAR certification for other buildings operated by the city, which oversees roughly 4 million square feet of facility space.

Additional Benefits

"Staff and city council are both extremely proud of the certification and awards that the government center has received over the years—not only from an energy efficiency and environmental point of view, but the cost savings that we've been able to realize," shared Rob Phocas, Charlotte's energy and sustainability manager.

In addition to using ENERGY STAR certification as a means to encourage further energy savings and to communicate those successes to the public, certification had another unanticipated outcome. The achievement allowed the city to participate in the local collaborative partnership Envision Charlotte, which aims to create "the most environmentally sustainable urban core in the nation."

One of the requirements for participating in Envision Charlotte is to have a building entered in the Portfolio Manager database. Through participation in the partnership, the city has enjoyed additional notoriety for energy successes in the government center building.

ENERGY STAR HAS PROVIDED THE MEANS TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS AND THE CONSIDERABLE ENERGY SAVINGS THAT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED IN THE GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING. NO BRAGGING REQUIRED.

"We're not the type to brag," explains David Miller, city energy manager, "but if others don't know what you're doing, they think you aren't doing anything to reduce energy use." ENERGY STAR has provided the means to share the good news and the considerable energy savings that have been achieved in the government center building. No bragging required.

For more information on ENERGY STAR certification, visit www.energystar.gov. To learn more about Charlotte's mission to promote clean energy and a healthy environment, visit www.power2charlotte.com. PM

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BY VICTOR SPANO

PUTTING VACANT STOREFRONTS TO USE

Making space for the arts benefits community

During 2010, Pacifica, California (population 39,000; Steve Rhodes, city manager), formed an economic development committee (EDC) consisting of the city manager, two councilmembers, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. This committee addresses economic issues the city has faced over the past few years as a result of the Great Recession.

Numerous projects have been undertaken, including but not limited to branding, location maps, business retention and attraction, building and planning process improvement, organizing of merchants associations, and cooperation with such entitles as the Small Business Administration.

One of the shopping centers in Pacifica, called Eureka Square, has suffered the most with a vacancy rate of more than 50 percent. An EDC member had visited a storefront art gallery during 2008 while visiting the city of Santa Rosa, California. The Santa Rosa Redevelopment Agency sponsored the Phantom Window Gallery project (http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/departments/recreationandparks/programs/artsandculture/artsdistrict/Pages/PhantomGallery.aspx) as a way to convert vacant storefronts into temporary art galleries. EDC's idea was to do something similar at Eureka Square or at any of the city's vacant spots.

Pivotal Progress

With no possible funding available from the city, EDC looked inward to figure out how a similar program could be established and temporarily housed in one of the vacant storefronts. One EDC member—an independent grocer and owner of Oceana Market in the Eureka Square Shopping Center—played a key role in first approaching the landlord through its management company and shepherding the project to completion.

Pacifica has an active arts community, which takes the form of the Art Guild of Pacifica with more than 400 members. EDC members and art guild members decided on the goal of establishing a gallery at the shopping center. There was agreement that this would be a great program, but there were issues to overcome that involved making an agreement with the landlord for a "free rent," month-to-month tenancy as well as financing the needed tenant improvements, insurance, and staffing.

The grocer prodded the art guild and landlord to craft a month-to-month agreement, which allowed both parties flexibility. The city of Pacifica was not a party of this rental agreement; the guild would be ultimately responsible for all utilities and upkeep as well as all costs for building out the gallery.

The sponsor, Oceana Market, assumed full responsibility for all ongoing operating expenses. It was hoped that some income from the artists themselves—from art shows and use of the space as a venue for other functions—could be reinvested and used to pay the operating expenses and nominal utilities.

Insurance on the space was accomplished through a rider on the art guild's existing policy for a facility elsewhere in Pacifica. Again, Oceana Market offered to reimburse the additional insurance premium until the gallery could become self-sufficient.

Author Spano is shown with a storefront gallery painting by artist Richard Herring, Pacifica, California, who is a member of the Art Guild of Pacifica.

Creative Contributions

The biggest obstacle was furnishing the space to accommodate art displays. The empty space—a former martial arts school—needed a total upgrade. Lighting for illuminating the artwork and furniture also was needed. Oceana Market stepped up once more. Its staff installed temporary movable light fixtures, painted the space, upgraded bathrooms, and covered some of the cracked flooring. Art guild members also assisted with the work.

Portability of the lighting fixtures and other improvements was an important consideration in the event the landlord rented the space to a paying tenant, and the installations needed to be easily moved elsewhere. After nearly six months of discussion, an attractive gallery was created.

Numerous artists were recruited to provide examples of their work for the grand opening. Restaurants and the grocer provided complimentary snacks and refreshments for the gala grand opening in April 2012. Nearly 150 people attended. A shopping center with little life had a full parking lot for the first time in many years. The community has warmly embraced the project.

Art is changed every six weeks, and there are opening night parties attracting large crowds for each changeover. Staffing of the gallery has not been an issue. Adequate numbers of art guild members are willing to pitch in to watch over their gallery. Word of the gallery reached the city's hotel business improvement district, and hotels have requested fliers on gallery openings for their guests.

Use of the gallery by the public was initially limited to weekends. In March 2013, however, a new group called The Oceana Art Gallery and Arts Collective, still 100 percent supported by Oceana Market and consisting of art guild members and others, assembled to improve management of the gallery. Their resolve is to increase offerings: gallery rentals to the community, classes, events, and live art (artists working on new art at the gallery itself), as well as possibly trying to attract artists who are regionally and nationally known.

Essential elements for a program like this have been: willing artists, willing landlord, some sponsorship on the part of private business, and some type of entity to carry the insurance for the gallery. But such galleries, involving no public funding, can be easily replicated and become community assets.

Pacifica's EDC, using the art gallery model, hopes to inspire similar enterprises at no public cost. It is currently researching the establishment of a small business incubator that would also fill a vacant storefront, and it plans to nurture businesses that will in time occupy other vacant stores in the city. PM

The storefront Oceana Art Gallery, located in the Eureka Square Shopping Center, Pacifica, California, was founded with the help of a local grocer.

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BY LARRY HOUSTOUN

THE AGE OF THE SMALL URBAN PARK

Size matters in new urban sites

America has in recent times produced a few signature urban parks of gargantuan dimensions: Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek; Brooklyn, New York's Prospect; and Chicago, Illinois's Grant parks are notable examples.

In the past century, America's foremost urban designer Daniel Burnham challenged Americans to think big because he believed only such projects have "the magic to stir men's minds." The products of such planning offered a taste of the countryside to harshly crowded industrial cities, places largely devoid of natural amenities.

Local governments and their populations have changed markedly in recent decades. Whole neighborhoods have been newly occupied with people seeking diversity in their living experiences, including convenient places for recreation, relaxation, and entertainment. Burnham's admonition, like many urban outdoor facilities, is obsolete.

Today, many small parks better serve urban populations than a few very large ones. Small parks generally fit into the urban fabric without displacement. They are typically accessible on foot or by bike. Arranging for neighborhood sponsors and volunteer cleanups are easier where there is widespread use by neighborhood residents producing a sense of collective ownership.

New York City decades ago probably created the model of what is often called a "vest pocket" park: Paley Park in midtown Manhattan has all the essential features—fountains, places to people watch, onsite food, and good maintenance. Paley serves as the relaxation site for one of the densest concentrations of people in North America.

Planning Objectives

Aspects of planning new or renovated small parks include:

1. Identify population concentrations without usable urban space within 10-minute walks.
2. Realize that potential recreation land should not be used for vehicular parking.
3. Realize that every local government should have an up-to-date outdoor recreation plan, recognizing changes in demographics and recreation preferences.
4. Set realistic goals for park creation and operating costs; measure changing conditions.
5. Involve resident advocates and like-minded organizations in planning and financing.

New Resources

An important new resource for planning, managing, and financing urban open space development and operations consists of business improvement districts (BIDs). These self-financing entities are best known for sidewalk cleaning and programs to strengthen downtown economies. There are more than 1,500 in the United States and Canada, generally

SMALL PARKS IMPROVE PROPERTY VALUES, ADD NEW URBAN DESTINATIONS FOR PEDESTRIANS, AND PUT MORE PEOPLE ON SIDEWALKS.

operating as nonprofit corporations but with local government involvement.

BIDs make public spaces more appealing to more people. Two Philadelphia BIDs and another nonprofit, for example, have produced almost a dozen small parks there, using previously ignored urban space for recreation. With seating and landscaping, these new facilities add greatly to the appearance and convenience of their commercial centers.

Each new facility is unique. Some are tiny slivers ("parklets") where streets intersect on angles, capturing a half acre of leisure space where there had been nothing before but concrete and parked cars. Another, perhaps two acres in size, provides grassy space above converging transit lines. All meet the first test of popular urban open space; they are convenient to use because each is in the midst of concentrated populations.

BIDs bring these resources to the table:

- Shared financing for various projects to improve the appearance and utility of public open space.
- Private sector participation in planning and management.
- Crews to keep the public domain clean and attractive.

A Look at Some Small Parks

Because there is no standard off-the-shelf definition of small parks and plazas, for the purposes of this article, they:

- Fit into the existing urban fabric without demolition.
- Exist near concentrations of residents, shoppers, and employees.
- Improve real estate values of nearby land.

Here are examples produced by two Philadelphia BIDS—Center City District and University City District, plus the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA).

Parklets. University City District has created three of these small parks, substituting landscaping, seating, and rest spots where cars once parked. While small, typically less than half an acre, these facilities vastly improve area appearance and bring park space closer to users.

Dilworth Plaza. The largest BID-sponsored park, a totally redesigned Dilworth Plaza, is now scheduled for completion in 2013. It is a two-acre traditional park with lots of grass and room for celebrations and special events. Next to city hall and converging transit lines, it will replace open space defined there almost entirely by large granite pavers. In its new form, skating will be available during winter months. Center City District is the sponsor.

Collins Park. Inspired by Paley Park, this small park improves pedestrian routes and encourages more walking in the shopping district. This half-acre facility was restored and enhanced the by Center City District, adding food for the first time.

Café Cret. At one acre, Philadelphia's Café Cret draws crowds to a new and popular eating place in an area that had long been pedestrian free. Center City District is the BID sponsor.

Sister Cities Park. This vacant and little used "park" space has been transformed into weekend play space with as many as 40 children at supervised play. Special events include family yoga, soccer shots, art in the park, story art, kids' concerts, fountains, and sailboats on the pond. Other attractions are sponsored by nearby institutions, including the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Franklin Institute. It is a Center City District project.

Porch. Those favoring sunbathing, reading, or studying in a comfortable place can visit the reconstructed three-fourths acre "Porch," formerly a parking area next to Thirtieth Street Station. This has become a pedestrian "facility" offering food, tables and chairs, 38 trees, entertainment, a farmers' market, mini golf, and concerts. Thirtieth Street Station parking spaces had been transformed by al fresco lunches and snackers. The Porch is a University City District BID project.

Race Street Pier. A former working pier on the Delaware River waterfront, the Race Street Pier has been redesigned with entertainment, picnic space, trees, and dramatic views of the river and its traffic. Part of the pier structure itself has been opened, revealing the type of structure formerly required to load and unload ships.

Lenfest Plaza. This area occupies a section of a normal street, linking two buildings, part of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. A large sculpture dominates the plaza that links two buildings of the PAFA.

Common Features

The Philadelphia projects, regardless of their size, reflect contemporary park design—in other words, most have places to eat, including sunny and shady spots with tables and seating and onsite food. They are centrally located and enhance pedestrian movement. They are attractively landscaped and reliably maintained. Considerable imagination was applied to selecting new uses for old urban space.

But there are other features that deserve attention and possible replication elsewhere. These new parks are often constructed on land previously used for parking or other purposes no longer needed.

BIDs serve these projects in important ways, including financing, programming, and organizing support from local governments, foundations, and other nonprofit organizations. The roles of other participants may be as complex as constructing Dilworth Plaza, which had to be coordinated with two active subway lines and shutting down one of the city's heaviest used traffic lanes.

Small parks contribute significantly to urban beautification and replace blighting conditions. They add interest to the streetscape and convenience for pedestrians. Most important, they build popularity among and value to users. PM

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BY JOAN MCCALLEN

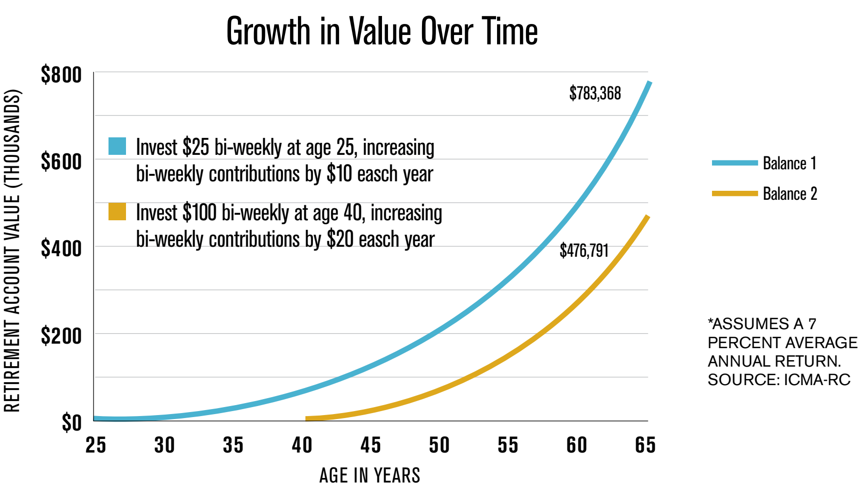
START EARLY, PLAN

Important steps to prepare for retirement

As life expectancy and the cost of health care continue to increase, some public sector employees may feel less confident that their savings will sustain them throughout retirement. According to the "2012 Retirement Confidence Survey: Job Insecurity, Debt Weigh on Retirement Confidence, Savings," presented by the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI), 23 percent of workers are not confident they are saving enough for retirement.

Retirement confidence, however, can be built through preparation and goal setting.

FIGURE 1. Growth in Value Over Time.



When considering retirement goals, it's important for employees to think about starting to save as early as possible. Saving earlier in your career can put time on your side, allowing you more time to save on a regular basis.

In addition, starting to contribute to an employer-sponsored retirement plan early and throughout your career can add up over time. Consult Figure 1 for an example of how starting to save at age 25 versus age 40 can make a huge difference in your long-term retirement savings balance.

Here are additional steps you may consider to help you work toward your retirement goals:

1. First, develop a detailed plan. Factors to take into account when devising a plan may include: anticipated health care costs, any additional savings, and anticipated retirement date. Use this information to help you estimate how much you should save each pay period, monthly, and annually in order to reach your retirement goals. A goal-based resource like RealizeRetirement, www.realizeretirement.org, can help you set personal savings goals and provides tools to help you meet them.

2. Make small changes to decrease spending and increase savings. Could you be splurging on items you can do without? Each month, you may be spending money on unnecessary items that could be invested instead. Use the Small Change, Big Savings Calculator at www.icmarc.org/smallchange to help you identify how much you could save each month.

3. Increase contributions to your retirement plan, when possible. Increasing contributions to your retirement account each month by even $10 or $20 more can add up. Consider contributing an additional small percentage to your plan when you receive a raise or as you save money by reducing spending.

4. Take projected health care costs into consideration. According to the Center for Retirement Research at Boston College, at age 65, a typical married couple free of chronic disease can expect to spend $197,000 on remaining, lifetime, health care costs—excluding nursing home care. Including nursing home care, the average cost is $260,000.[1]

No matter what stage you are in your career, you can make small changes like scaling back on small daily expenses and having a plan in order to be better prepared to meet your retirement goals. At ICMA-RC, our mission is to help public employees continue to build retirement security and to empower them to feel confident that they will meet their retirement goals. PM

ENDNOTES

1 Webb, Anthony, and Zhivan, Natalia. What Is the Distribution of Lifetime Health Care Costs from Age 65? Center for Retirement Research at Boston College. March 2010, No.10-4.

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BY RYAN BIRCHMEIER

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT 2.0

A look at how Philadelphia is using social media to engage constituents

When government and social media intersect, an opportunity arises to truly engage residents.

Using social media in government makes sense. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are meant not only to push information out but also to create a dialogue around it. Social media provides government officials with the opportunity to be more accessible and transparent; it provides them with the opportunity to engage constituents in a way that yields results.

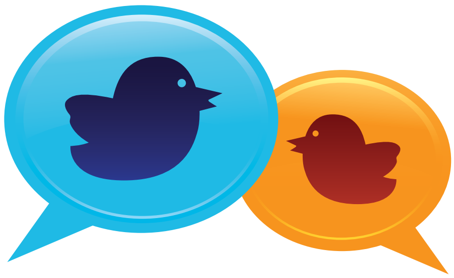
Richard Negrin, managing director for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has bought into the effectiveness of social media. Both individually and through programs and initiatives, this communication platform has been used as a true extension of governing entities. Even better, these extensions offer a place for residents to become part of the process.

Last fall's Occupy Movement, part of a national protest against economic and social inequality, was perhaps the best example of Negrin's use of social media. As the protest began, @RichNegrin made himself an active and accessible voice in the process. Here are a few of his tweets at the beginning of the movement:

@RichNegrin: "Is at @OccupyPhilly watching democracy in action. Discussing agreeing to a permit. #GodBlessAmerica."
@RichNegrin: "Thanks for working together @OccupyPhilly."

A Way to Address Concerns

It wasn't all supportive. Tension arose a few days into the Occupy Movement. Negrin had sent a letter to the protest that wasn't answered for more than two weeks; some of the protestors had marked city hall with graffiti after promises were made to keep things clean; and a few protestors even blocked police headquarters as a stance against police.



This is where the true opportunity for civic engagement emerged. The Twitter platform offered a forum for the managing director and the occupiers to address their concerns with everyone on the same playing field. Negrin could represent the city, answer questions, and show strength when needed; this representation was instantaneous and could facilitate feedback. Twitter became the movement's communication center, and Negrin met protest participants there:

@RichNegrin: "We remain committed to working together but #OccupyPhilly must keep their promises. Promised to be lawful. #integrity" (Attached to a picture of the graffiti).
@RichNegrin: "[UNNAMED TWITTER USER] blocking police HQ is pointless. It's not about the police. You are hurting your cause. #occupyphilly."
[UNNAMED TWITTER USER]: "@RichNegrin take a look at #occupyoakland right now. Please work to see that #occupyphilly and the PPD don't have to go through this."
@RichNegrin: "[UNAMED TWITTER USER] Of course. We can work towards showing the world how to avoid that together. First step is to keep communicating. #occupyphilly."

Although this communication was sometimes strained, the important takeaway from the interaction was that communication actually existed. Social media facilitated a line of communication between the city and the protest.

This communication seemed to generate a general respect and cooperation from most participants. This general respect was one of the biggest contributors to the Occupy Philly movement not turning violent for either side.

A Full Range of Applications

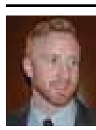
Other programs within the managing director's office are also active on social media. This is especially true of Philly311, the city's nonemergency contact center. In the past year, Philly311 has extended its services through its use of Twitter and Facebook.

As staff members in the managing director's office are active on social media, the Paper.li platform is used, which aggregates social media sources into a weekly newspaper.

Negrin also wanted to ensure the city's technology and innovation efforts had their own voice. In November 2012, he directed the implementation of *The MDO Digest*, a daily blog that highlights community heroes, employees, and accomplishments.

This multichannel approach to social media has meshed with the city of Philadelphia's efforts to promote government accessibility. Through the use of social media, Negrin has been able to govern more publicly and make sure that more residents get needed information.

Most important is that the managing director has helped to make sure that when the city government communicates with residents, they are able to communicate back in an important dialogue. This is what civic engagement 2.0 looks like. PM



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BY JAMIE VERBRUGGE, ICMA-CM

SEEKING SOLACE IN SPORTS ANNOUNCING

Like local government, it gets in one's blood

Caught in the middle. Raised, angry voices coming at me from both directions. Raw emotion and open conflict creating a tense environment. At times, the urge is overpowering to yell, "Knock it off!" And yet I maintain a professional and neutral demeanor and go about my business.

Sometimes I wonder why I do this nearly every other Friday and Saturday night for the better part of six months.

I should probably clarify at this point that I'm not talking about my job as city manager in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. Our city council meetings don't typically involve shouted insults and major penalties for checking from behind. No, I'm talking hockey.

I seek solace from the stresses of local government management in between the penalty boxes at Mariucci Arena on the campus of the University of Minnesota. Since 1998, I have been the public address voice of the Golden Gopher hockey team.

In addition to hockey, I have also been the voice of Golden Gopher wrestling since 1988 and for Gopher football since 2001. I enjoy football and wrestling a lot. Our wrestling team has won three NCAA championships, and college football on a Saturday afternoon is a great American tradition. But announcing college hockey provides the best stories.

My Hockey Tales

To wit—one game involved a Gophers player and an opposing player getting into a fight early in the game. Into the box they came, yelling back and forth from either side of me, in a language we refer to as Hockey-ese. It is a hybrid use of Canadian English and a string of expletives that are not fit to print.

The same two returned to the box in the second period, carrying on their [ahem] conversation. In fact, the opposing player used a phrase in Hockey-ese that none of us working professionals in the box had ever heard before or since, leaving us shaking our heads and scrambling for a translation dictionary.

By the third period, when they returned together, the opposing player took to discussing the Minnesota cheer squad with our guy and offered less than flattering reviews of his own school's cheer squad (again with words that make me blush). Such is the ebb and flow inside the penalty box.

Similar Work Ethos

There are not a whole lot of crossover skills between the work of a city manager and that of a public address announcer for sporting events. There is, however, a similarity in how the work is conducted. My job as an announcer is to provide context and information—and sometimes feeling—without distracting from the game itself or becoming the object of attention.

If I do my job right, the crowd has a great experience without realizing that I facilitated some of that feeling; as in the euphoria of hearing who scored the goal and the joy of the celebration that follows.

In that way, it is not unlike the work managers do with their staff and elected officials every day. Our success as local government managers is sometimes best measured by people not noticing what we do, despite doing it in plain sight every day.

Joy of Announcing

My family refers to February and March, after six months of not having me around many weekend nights, as the season of discontent around my house. My wife and three children enjoy the fun of going to games when they can, but the long slog of the sports season combined with the many night meetings at work puts a stress on us. I am fortunate that they are supportive, patient, and (mostly) understanding of my love for all things maroon and gold.

The joy of announcing is exhilarating and hard to get out of the blood. I tried retiring once, out of deference to my family and due to greater responsibility in my career. It lasted one season. Because one moment in my announcing career was like no other, I had to go back.

In front of a mostly hometown crowd of 19,000 people in St. Paul, at the end of an amazing overtime game against the University of Maine in 2002, I was able to celebrate the first NCAA hockey championship for the Gophers in more than 30 years—the first in their back-to-back championship seasons.

I had to get special permission from the NCAA staff to use one word different from the script. Instead of announcing "the" University of Minnesota was the national champion, I solicited one of the loudest roars I've ever heard when I was able to say, "Ladies and gentleman, the 2002 national champions, YOUR University of Minnesota Golden Gophers!"

I get tingles thinking about it even now. And the hope that I will feel it again . . . well, that hope is the reason I keep going back every season. It gets in your blood, just as local government management does.

Go, Gophers! RAH! PM

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