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Rewriting the Story of Inner-Ring Suburbs

Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a project of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, a nonprofit coalition of 32 inner-ring suburbs. Since 2005, RRC has been altering the narrative of mature communities. It's one of the nation's first initiatives to measure a city's or a county's progress toward "redevelopment readiness" with a certification program that brings with it the expertise of a steering committee composed of developers, planners, advocates, and government officials. Using a set of best practices and technical assistance, RRC helps localities build deliberate, fair, and consistent development processes from the inside out—and to effectively communicate them.

Anna Clark and Melanie Piana, Ferndale, Michigan.

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Census demographics have a message for managers.

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George Purefoy, Frisco, Texas

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Welcome to the E-Government Library of the Future – Today

Public libraries have become partners of local government agencies providing digital e-government services.

Robert Davidsson, Palm Beach County, Florida.

READ ARTICLE

Life as a Local Government Manager: It's Who We Are

Three managers show how life as a local government manager can be unique.

Claire Collins, Covington, Virginia.

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Residential overcrowding has far-reaching impacts.

Vincent Diem, Winchester, Virginia.

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2007 Manager Salaries*

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Lessons Learned from Infrastructure Development*

What Burley Is Doing to Enlarge Idaho's Rural Economy.

John Moeller, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Mark Mitton, Doug Manning, and Jon Anderson, Burley, Idaho.

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James Svava, professor, School of Public Affairs, and director, Center for Urban Innovation, Arizona State University, Phoenix, Arizona.

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Rewriting the Story of Inner-Ring Suburbs

by **Anna Clark and Melanie Piana**

The best stories are the familiar ones. From Greek myths to boy-meets-girl, our culture has built a bank of stories through centuries of retelling. No matter how predictable the endings, we find new ways to tell them.

One old story that's playing out in southeast Michigan has already cycled around the country. You've heard it before: development bypasses older built-out communities for new suburbs on the outer fringe. Economic development in inner-ring suburbs struggles while state and federal investments are allocated to new-growth areas, leaving local governments incorporated before 1960 scrambling. Left behind is a glut of buildings that are no longer usable. Meanwhile, urban sprawl is catalyzed when open spaces are paved over, as empty structures exist mere miles away.

Not a happy ending by a long shot. But this is one familiar story that we're going to change.

Redevelopment Ready Communities® (RRC) is a project of the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, a nonprofit coalition of 32 inner-ring suburbs. Since 2005, RRC has been altering the narrative of mature communities. It's one of the nation's first initiatives to measure a city's or a county's progress toward "redevelopment readiness" with a certification program that brings with it the expertise of a steering committee comprising developers, planners, advocates, and government officials. Using a set of best practices and technical assistance, RRC helps localities build deliberate, fair, and consistent development processes from the inside out—and to effectively communicate them.

"(RRC) makes communities ask why they operate the way they do, and it seems that quite often the answer is just 'because we've always done it that way,'" said Jason Friedmann, senior planner in Michigan's Macomb County and RRC committee member.

Friedmann goes on: "It's exciting to see our communities embracing new, innovative strategies, and adapting. Our communities must participate in these types of programs if they want to survive."

When a city becomes a certified Redevelopment Ready Community, it promotes itself as a location that has transformed development practices that no longer apply to modern spaces. Gone are the nonsensical logistical traps buried in decades-old ordinances. In their place are clear procedures, a community-supported redevelopment vision, an open and predictable review process—and much more compelling sites for developers to locate their latest projects.

"[RRC] is good for cities—especially built-out brownfield communities—because developers can take comfort in knowing that the community embraces redevelopment, that it has a vision for specific sites that community leaders buy into," said Jason Horton, RRC member and executive vice president of REDICO Management, a local development firm.

This time, we're the authors of our own story.

In the Beginning

It took two years of planning before RRC launched its pilot program. With funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the C. S. Mott Foundation, RRC brought 23 academics, city planners, economic developers, lawyers, developers, and state officials together in 2003.

2007 redevelopment ready communities® BEST PRACTICES

TOTAL POINTS	100
standard 01: community visioning and education	32
01.1 Baseline Communications	2
01.2 Stakeholder Involvement	8
01.3 Site Specific Visioning	9
01.4 Commit to using Financial Tools for Specific Sites	9
01.5 Redevelopment Plan	2
01.6 Redevelopment Project Timelines	2
standard 02: continuing education for public officials	5
02.1 Establish a Training Plan	3
02.2 Educational Requirements	2
standard 03: tools for redevelopment	8
03.1 Financial Redevelopment Tools	8
standard 04: development regulations	15
04.1 Zoning	7
04.2 Development Review	5
04.3 Supplementary Development Regulations	3
standard 05: marketing of redevelopment sites	15
05.1 General Community Marketing	6
05.2 Promoting Site Specific Information	9
standard 06: redevelopment plan review process	25
06.1 Streamlining the Process	8
06.2 Documentation	6
06.3 Staff Review and Project Tracking	6
06.4 Maintain Communication During the Process	5



"What drives me is helping these struggling older communities, who find themselves—through no fault of their own—they find that the rules are against them," said RRC member and Eastpointe, Michigan, economic development director, Steve Horstman.

The first order of business: mapping the territory. "Even before we drafted the best practices standards, we did an exhaustive inventory," said Dave Scurto, associate planner at Carlisle-Wortman and RRC's primary consultant. "We examined how long it took to get a permit through a city, we looked at tax revenue."

When it came down to details, differences emerged. "In the beginning, it really was the planners against the developers," said RRC member Andrea Brown, director of the Michigan Association of Planning. "I was the most vociferous even among the planners about the value of visioning—not just with elected and appointed officials, but [that] the community needs to be involved, especially in the more challenging sites."

Expectations shifted, remembers Scurto. "At first, everybody said we'd talk about finances—tax abatements, tools that the state put in place," Scurto said. "But we ultimately reached a place where everyone understood what we were talking about with vision—not just the writing but planning—as part of the action to engage citizens with public education."

The committee's dedication was palpable. "We're all very different people who committed to meet every other week, to give up at least two hours and duke it out, to finally understand each other's sides," said RRC member Maxine Berman, special projects director for Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm.

While they could be grueling, the preliminary talks were also seen as revolutionary. "That's why it's so exciting to have everyone at the table—the developers too," Horstman said. "It's the first time we sat down together and came up with concrete solutions."

When interests that initially seemed to compete finally emerged into consensus, the Michigan Suburbs Alliance unveiled its assessment tool: RRC best practices.

Ground Setting

The six RRC best practices standards are designed to determine which redevelopment processes work and which contain barriers. More than a checklist, the standards are weighted on a 100-point scale. A city must achieve 80 out of 100 points to become certified. Cities renew their RRC status after three years through a second evaluation.

- **Community visioning and education** is one of the most heavily weighted standards. How does a city engage citizens in planning? Are master plan updates accessible? Is there site-specific visioning?
- **Development plan review process** is also heavily weighted. Here, how many approval gates a project must maneuver are examined. Cities receive points for procedures on special land use requests, site plan reviews, and rezoning. Most important, a city must have an "intake professional" to process applications. This saves the developer from bouncing from department to department.
- Through **continuing education for public and appointed officials**, we examine what types of ongoing training opportunities cities provide for the planning commission and zoning board of appeals, ensuring better decisions.

- State and federal financial incentives are plentiful. Local governments are urged to promote what tools for redevelopment they're willing to use.
- A community's zoning ordinances are reviewed under the topic of **development regulations** to see if it's paced with changing market demands.
- Development regulations then moves neatly into **marketing redevelopment sites**, where cities promote sites with packages of materials.

How does the balance of administrative power lie? The RRC committee accepts cities into the program, reviews evaluations, and recommends improvements. It has the final vote to award or deny certification.

Program implementation resides with the Suburbs Alliance's associate director, who is the liaison between local governments and the RRC committee. The associate director leads each community through certification in partnership with Dave Scurto, RRC's primary consultant.

Rising Action

By 2005, RRC was ready for the first round of local governments. Five Michigan cities that represented the geographic and demographic diversity of the Suburbs Alliance's membership were selected for pilot certification: Eastpointe, River Rouge, Hazel Park, Ypsilanti, and Southfield.

Rochelle Freeman is Southfield's business developer and an RRC committee member. She's adamant about how RRC pushed Southfield toward a new vision of how to use city buildings. "We have a lot of open office space—we just had one office building torn down," Freeman said. "Nowadays, with the digital revolution, people are working at home or sharing offices with, say, three other people. We need to reimagine things. It was an office but maybe it can be something better."

Horstman, who championed Eastpointe through pilot certification, recalls that RRC improved his city's communications. "[An RRC city] needs a Web site that's kept current, with easy access to information," Horstman said. "Developers need a central location to see the community vision. What properties are available? What are the community needs? There should be accessible information on the planning commission—when do they meet? Are there fees?"

Self-questioning is one of the most meaningful results of RRC. It signals that redevelopment in this community is different.

"The cities themselves deserve a lot of credit for saying, 'hey, maybe we have to change something about ourselves,'" said Berman. "Instead of, 'oh, we need more revenue sharing,' or, 'oh, it's the state's fault.'"

Additional Communities Sign On

After the pilot cities were certified in 2006—with statewide attention—RRC accepted second- and third-round localities. Today, 14 inner-ring suburbs participate in RRC. The original five went through recertification last year.

These urban communities are in a new position to boast. Whether it's interesting neighborhoods, large trees, centrally located schools, or committed leadership, RRC cities are poised to communicate local wealth through the best practices standards.

And those standards are constantly improved. The RRC committee revises them regularly, belying any neat divide between preparation and action. The committee is dedicated to constant evolution, which is critical when the committee is challenged by, for example, changes in leadership. When a city has only one or two individuals working on RRC, the setup is primed for misunderstandings when those individuals move on.

"Many cities don't have a planner," Brown said. "And there are a lot of things to do. We're talking about streamlining redevelopment operations and ways of doing things that the city has done the same way for 20 years. It's a big job."

The solution? Write it down. "We need to document everything, so everybody can see the process," Scurto added. "Process is king."

If a transparent process isn't enough to move a community through RRC certification, Scurto has another idea. "We need a certain amount of stability [in local government staff and leadership]. If that's not there, maybe we'll hold off this year, and the city can reapply next year," he said.

Besides city fluctuations, the committee is preoccupied with securing funding to support technical assistance. "We're finding ways to make progress sustainable," Horstman said. "Should [RRC] be fee driven? There could be a small fee for developers to come to communities. For them, it would be worth it."

But RRC committee members agree that it's Michigan's economy that is the biggest obstacle to redevelopment. Brown pointed out that "there's not a lot of investment even in greenfield communities" right now.

But Berman believes that the moment is all the better for RRC. "In a tough economy, it's hard to see results in two seconds," she said. "As things get better—and they will—RRC communities will have a big leg up." Scurto echoed Berman's thoughts. "Everything goes through cycles," he said. "We're setting the table for dinner, and when dinner is ready, we'll be there to eat."

"Why *wouldn't* I go to a RRC community when I know the process will be faster and more transparent?" Berman

added.

Denouement

Less than three years into active certification, and in the midst of Michigan's economic troubles, has RRC brought the story of southeast Michigan's inner-ring suburbs to a satisfying ending?

Scurto said that, thanks to certification, "we do see more bricks and mortar go up" in redeveloping communities.

Horstman said that redevelopment goes deeper than it might seem. "We're so new, we're not going to see the fancy new buildings yet," he said. "The concrete result is the change in internal processes. Is that front-page newsworthy? No. Is that going to have a concrete benefit and result? Yes."

That benefit could be even greater beyond southeast Michigan. "In states that aren't as hard-hit as Michigan, you'd probably see more results more quickly," Horstman said.

"This is a very movable program that could be taken anywhere in Michigan, and anywhere in the country," said Berman. "In the redevelopment community, this is the best thing going."

Scurto recognizes that the story in southeast Michigan is one that just might go cross-country. "These should be national practices!" Scurto exclaimed. "I want to see them become a moot point because they're so normal."

What might need to be tweaked if the program were applied elsewhere? Berman noted that in most states county government plays a larger role in local redevelopment; the RRC program would need to be adapted.

But regardless of a region's peculiarities, RRC hinges on demystification in both internal procedures and between collaborators. It fosters renewed honesty as we rebuild the communities we love.

"One of my favorite things is the real back and forth among communities, developers, and the Suburbs Alliance," Horstman said. "Nobody's afraid to pull punches and be direct and honest with one another, and that's a good thing. We're all on the same side. We're equals."

Anna Clark is communications coordinator, Michigan Suburbs Alliance, Ferndale, Michigan (anna@suburbsalliance.org), and Melanie Piana is associate director, Michigan Suburbs Alliance, Ferndale (melanie@suburbsalliance.org).



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Welcome to the E-Government Library of the Future – Today

by Robert Davidsson

With the federal government outsourcing, state governments downsizing, and local governments facing budget cutbacks, public libraries in America are used as the social service providers of last resort for many citizens in need of an array of public sector programs.

The E-Government Act of 2002 mandates that federal agencies cut back many traditional programs for the public and, in their place, offer government services in digital form. This process allows agencies to cut staffing and office infrastructure costs. However, it often places the burden on citizens to find the means of accessing new electronic e-government services.

As defined by the Information Use Management and Policy Institute of Florida State University, e-government is the use of technology, especially the Internet, as a means to deliver services to citizens, businesses, and other government or organizational entities. One of the goals of the E-Government Act is to offer an electronic alternative to paper-based and direct agency-provided services requiring additional staff.

For citizens in need of government assistance, this change in the means of service provision by public sector agencies is resulting in the use of local public libraries as de facto e-government service centers. The public library provides the means (computers with Internet access) necessary to view and interact with electronic government services, especially for persons on the poorer side of the digital divide.

E-GOVERNMENT AND LIBRARIES

The list of e-government services transacted on local public library computers is impressive—and growing. It includes driver's license renewals, unemployment and workers' compensation claims, permit applications, IRS digital tax forms and filing services, traffic-fine payments online, immigration documents, and even U.S. Postal Service mail tracing. This trend toward digital public sector services continues unabated at all levels of government.

When the federal government required Medicare recipients to select a Medicare prescription drug plan in 2005–2006 from a digital listing of U.S. service providers, elderly beneficiaries nationwide entered their local public libraries and used library computers to register online. For many persons, it was their first experience using an e-government service.

Social Security Online, the official Internet site of the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA), is currently promoting online applications for benefits, targeting retiring baby boomers in an effort to reduce long lines at SSA service centers. Other examples of digital SSA services include applications for disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits found on its Web site.

A frequently used e-government program at the state level is the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), which routinely refers its users to public libraries in the state of Florida to complete digital benefit forms online using both the computers and the technical expertise of staff found at their neighborhood libraries. The DCF's ACCESS Florida (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency) Web site is accessed by state residents to apply online for food stamps, temporary cash assistance, and Medicaid.

In an effort to prepare librarians in the state of Florida for demands placed on them by clients in need of electronic government services, the FSU Information Use Management and Policy Institute is currently developing an e-government Web site as a resource for professional staff. The institute's goals are to inform communities about e-government in libraries, assist libraries engaged in e-government services, and help public librarians and government

officials assess and improve e-government Web sites and services. FSU's initiative works with both government and library service providers to resolve e-government issues in the community.

At the local level, the Palm Beach County, Florida, library system is demonstrating its commitment to electronic government services by providing a specialized "Government Research Services" information Web page designed as a user-friendly digital guide to indexed local, state, and federal online programs and documents. The site is edited and maintained by library staff. Since its inception in 1996, the site has been used annually by more than 45,000 patrons in need of e-government services.

The library system also offers monthly classes in e-government searching on the Internet in its main library computer center to help library users become familiar with online services and documents now available in digital format. More than 76 percent of public libraries in the United States now offer some type of information technology training, which encourages and prepares clients to use e-government resources.

E-GOVERNMENT USE STUDIES

The American Library Association (ALA) formally adopted the "Resolution Affirming the Role of Libraries in Providing E-Government and Emergency Services" on January 24, 2007, at its midwinter meeting. It states, "Libraries are eager to work closely with government agencies to service their local communities effectively." Eager or not, the reality is that public libraries are now essential purveyors of e-government services to a large segment of the public.

In its 2007 policy statement, the ALA viewed its role as "encouraging continued research documenting library needs and capacity to provide effective e-government and emergency response/recovery services and help libraries development best practices and train staff to deliver these essential services."

In Florida, the landmark study, *Public Libraries and the Internet 2006*, conducted by the Florida State University College of Information, found 21.4 percent of the surveyed libraries listing "access to and assistance with local, state, and federal government electronic services" as one of the largest impacts (demands) of Internet service provision on the state's public libraries.

The findings in the Florida survey are supported by the comprehensive Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2006–2007, funded jointly by the ALA and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The national study collected information about public library Internet connectivity, use, services, funding, and sustainability issues.

Their report confirms that technology is bringing more—not less—public library use. The ALA study states, "While technology is being woven more and more into people's daily lives, about one-third of Americans still do not own desktop computers or have Internet access at home."

The nationwide library user survey recorded 1.3 billion patron visits in fiscal year 2004. The new role of the local public library as a government-linked community computer center is a factor contributing to an annual growth rate of 4.6 percent currently experienced by public libraries.

E-GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR LIBRARIES

One finding in the 2007 ALA study is of great importance to the future of e-government services in the United States. A total of 73 percent of the surveyed libraries reported they are the only source of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities. While many agencies are converting to e-government services, they are not all providing the computers, training, and Internet access technology necessary for their clients to access their digital forms or conduct online transactions.

The poor, the elderly, the disabled members of our society—who are often the persons most in need of government social services—would be denied free access to online government applications, services, and programs in communities if not for public computers made available by their local libraries.

By providing a network of computers for public use, as well as wireless Wi-Fi access, libraries are addressing an essential community need for a large segment of users. As additional government agencies automate their services, the corresponding demand for library computers for conducting e-government transactions is expected to increase in the future.

Funding for computer hardware and technology upgrades is the main barrier facing public libraries in the provision of e-government support services. Professional library staff also require training in the use of new government databases and Web-based services so they can effectively assist the public.

According to the ALA study, total technology expenditures, including staff training, database licensing, and telecommunications services, cost the average U.S. public library \$166,181 in fiscal year 2006. The largest single source of revenue for technology-related expenditures comes from local and county sources, supplemented with state and federal telecommunications special project funding.

According to the ALA, many libraries depend on private donations and nonprofit grants, such as Gates Foundation technology grants, to cover the cost of computer hardware expenditures and upgrades. Their 2007 report states that public libraries may not be in a position to rely on local tax support to fund technology; instead they are relying on external fundraising to provide what have become basic library services.

WHAT'S NEXT?

When the federal E-Government Act was enacted, some pundits were of the opinion that libraries would be among the obsolete institutions replaced by electronic information services. Contrary to this prediction, public libraries have become vital partners of agencies providing digital e-government services by offering public access computing services to the users of their social services.

For an e-government service provision partnership between government agencies and public libraries to be successful and of continuing benefit to their taxpayer-clients in the future, cooperative funding strategies for new computer technology upgrades and staff training must become a high-priority issue in communities across the country.

Robert Davidsson is manager, Government Research Service section, Library System, Palm Beach County, Florida (www.pbclibrary.org/grs.htm).

Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of three PM articles on the importance of libraries in our communities. Published in March was "Libraries: Partners in Sustaining Communities." Coming in May is "Public-Private Partnership Saves Public Libraries, Avoids New Taxes."

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Life as a Local Government Manager: It's Who We Are

by Claire Collins

Life as a local government manager is often referred to as "living in a fishbowl" or, as a diverse group of managers suggested during a local government conference held at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, Virginia, in November 2006, it is said that the life of a manager is unique. That uniqueness was the foundation for four Virginia local government managers, including this author, to highlight the everyday reality of life for a manager. This article is a snapshot of each of us on the conference panel and it explains why we do what we do.

If all of us had been told at the age of 18 that we would be local government managers, we would have been surprised and in all likelihood would not have known what a local government manager is or does. Now we know firsthand, and we share our knowledge with university and college students and faculty as we did in Richmond in the hope that the local government management profession will be considered both valuable and fun.

MY CONCISE STORY

For me, public service has been a mission that started at the young age of five. I observed the years of tireless and dedicated service of my father, who served with the U.S. military. I also observed my mother volunteering her time in every community we lived throughout the United States and overseas to do her part to help in the betterment of people. My parents, who were my role models, instilled in me the desire to work hard, to give to others, to not forget where a person comes from, to set high-quality goals, and to treat others how you want to be treated.

As a young adult, I worked in the private sector but always kept a close watch on and an interest in government and law, which resulted in my master's degree in public administration from VCU. I began my local government career in 1988 and quickly realized it was my calling and mission to put people first and build networks and relationships for creating and helping build a sense of community, no matter where the community is located.

I served as the first public affairs officer of Henrico County, Virginia. At the time, I did not realize the impact of my work on the community, but when I attended a legislative meeting in the Virginia General Assembly building late one night in Richmond and testified in front of animal activists about how stray dogs are handled by animal control, I quickly learned about the strong opinions of animal rights supporters.

I found a mentor in Bill LaVecchia, who was Henrico county manager and who always had his door open to me and to all county employees. He touched base with employees as often as possible and believed that, although citizens are number one, it is extremely important to cultivate good relationships with employees. He also liked staff members to learn "his ways." His ways included promoting the professional growth of staff so they received as much professional training as possible to better themselves and their community. I served as an assistant with him until his retirement.

After Henrico, I was appointed the first female and second county administrator to serve Bath County, Virginia. During my 14-year tenure in Bath, I recognized that government is best which governs not at all. In the small county with a population of approximately 5,000, I found that the most gratifying work as a local government manager came from working with and for the community in a fair and equitable manner.

My first four years were challenging and tumultuous, calming down later to allow for the shared community vision and capital projects to be funded and completed. I passed my torch there in April 2006 to become city manager of Covington, Virginia.

During 20 years as a local government manager, I have kept my family close and keep smiling no matter what happens. The support network and faith I have and continue to cultivate keeps my local government management

flame alive for me.

STORIES OF THREE

Many managers who are consummate professionals have their own special "I'm a manager because" stories. Here are the stories of three who participated in the conference session.

The city manager of Lynchburg, Virginia, L. Kimball Payne III, known as "Kim," is a well-respected and talented Virginia local government manager. His military background led him to work in government, and he served nearly eight years of active duty as a naval flight officer with his last assignment as a naval ROTC instructor at the University of Virginia. He is a retired commander in the Naval Reserve.

His quiet and sincere nature have served him well in his local government career, which began in February 1984. Methodical in thinking and always seeking the most innovative and team-based approach to service delivery for the community he serves, Kim finds his rewards in his family and serving the city where he grew up. Before he served in Lynchburg, he was the assistant county administrator of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, where he later was appointed and served as county administrator for 14 years. His longevity and vision are noted in Spotsylvania County today.

He has the ability to see beyond the current and plan for the future. He learned this while studying for master's degrees in planning and public administration at the University of Virginia. An avid Cavaliers fan, he is often spotted cheering at University of Virginia sporting events or watching the Richmond Braves play baseball. His affinity for team sports crosses over into his management style and how he deals with employees and, above all, in how he relates to his spouse and five children.

His advice to young professionals and students considering which career path to choose is to follow your instincts and go talk to local government managers and people who work in government to obtain their perspectives on why they do what they do. For Kim, he does it for the love of community.

He, too, has had mentors in past managers, especially in Sonny Culverhouse, often called "the father of Lynchburg." Putting music and entertainment into your work and life is one of the many ideas that Sonny passed on to Kim, as well as all the deep, dark secrets of the who, what, where, when, and how of goings on and people in Lynchburg.

Kim reassures all that being you and having fun is part of having a good life as a local government manager.

J. Randall Wheeler, county administrator of Spotsylvania County, Virginia, followed in Kim Payne's footsteps. Randy now holds a position that Kim previously held. He started his local government career in Fauquier County, Virginia, following the receipt of a master's degree in public administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His first position in Fauquier was director of the office of management and budget.

Later, he was appointed assistant county administrator and deputy county administrator until his appointment as county administrator. Randy has moved up the ranks in Spotsylvania and is a prime example of a young career-minded professional who knows what he wants and has worked diligently toward his professional and community goals.

Once rural Spotsylvania County has become a suburb of Fredericksburg and, as such, has encountered many planning and development issues involving the need for negotiation and compromise among stakeholder groups. Randy's subtle and friendly attitude disarms critics and allows for honest and frank discussions and negotiations when solutions need to be found.

With a spouse and young children, he is constantly juggling in order to both spend time with them and devote himself to his local government management profession. His youth and ability to get along with total strangers has made it easy for him to be a manager.

As with most managers, however, he has encountered setbacks and disappointments on the job during his management career. Despite the down times, he perseveres because he believes in his community and the life that he has. His best advice is to keep your cool, analyze situations, and be prepared for the unexpected.

A true mover and shaker is Town Manager Marc Verniel of Blacksburg, Virginia. Young and full of energy, Marc is a stellar example of why a young professional would consider a career in local government and particularly in local government management. He began his career in local government after completing his master's degree in urban and regional planning at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg.

As a comprehensive planner, he was responsible for restructuring and rewriting Blacksburg's comprehensive plan and the town's zoning and subdivision ordinances; his success at those tasks led to his appointment to assistant town manager. Marc spearheaded the creation of an economic development strategic plan and a downtown master plan, facilitated improvements to the town's operating and capital improvement program processes, and led the creation of the town's technology department.

Marc is known for establishing positive and proactive relationships with administrators at Virginia Tech, the business community, and civic and nonprofit organizations for the benefit of enhancing the Blacksburg community. In August 2005, he was appointed town manager.

His planning background has made Marc able to apply time management skills as he serves as a director on numerous boards in the Blacksburg area and also coaches soccer, which his children play.

He also has experienced firsthand the bad times that sometimes come with a management job. He was involved in and had to deal with the April 16, 2007, Virginia Tech tragedy. His leadership behind the scenes in handling the devastation to this community during the tragedy was superb and has made him a well-respected manager in Virginia.

WHAT OUR LIVES AS LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS MEAN

Mentors are important in our lives, and their support is there for us in both the tough and the good times. Families and especially children are important to fill the void that careers do not fill. Faith and fortitude are important in our desire to do good for humanity.

If we had to do it all over again, all of us would repeat what we have done thus far. I speak for the other managers who served with me on the VCU panel by saying that we are fulfilling lifelong dreams and missions as we go about being local government managers. It is our goal of helping communities come together to create and re-create themselves that keeps us whole.

Even as we deal with situations that are disappointing and frustrating, we think of the freedoms that we have in the United States and what democracy means. Even as we deal with disagreements and adverse situations, in the end they define who and what we are. Local government managers take the initiative to do better for all citizens.

We do not mind living in that fishbowl or being called unique. We still make time for a personal life with our partners, perform work for betterment of the community, and have fun working with people. It's just this simple: Local government management is where we want to be.

Claire Collins, ICMA-CM, is city manager of Covington, Virginia (ccollins@covington.va.us).

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Ethics

The Mayor Is Under Attack

Q. The mayor has asked the town manager to take the lead in defending her character against recent attacks by her detractors. These individuals have criticized the mayor for using a town cell phone for personal business. The cell phone plan that the town provides covers a certain number of minutes, and the mayor's monthly charges often exceed the plan's allowance. Although the mayor often makes some reimbursement to the town for excess charges, her critics charge that the mayor has been unethical in asking the town to pay for some of the out-of-plan charges.

The critics also say that the mayor has lied to residents, making campaign promises that she never intended to keep. The town manager is sympathetic to the mayor as the town's finances have been strained since she was elected. The town has had to make tough choices just to maintain town services, so some of the mayor's priorities for service improvements have been put on the back burner. The town manager seeks advice on how to deal with the mayor's requests. He believes that some of the mayor's critics might decide to run for town council in the future. He is uncomfortable taking the lead in responding to the attacks, although he sees the need to respond to issues related to city services.

A. It is important for the town manager to stay above the fray when there are political attacks on individual members of the town council, including the mayor. Defending the conduct of an individual elected official could make it appear that the town manager is a political operative, rather than a professional. It is appropriate for the town manager to defend policies adopted by the town council and to update the community on staff's progress in achieving town council goals.

One step the town manager can take immediately is to change the cell plan policy. The town can either get a plan with unlimited use or ask the mayor to pay for the existing plan and receive a monthly reimbursement from the town for official business.

The town manager can offer the mayor private counsel and personal support, which may bolster her confidence in dealing with the issues directly. Elected officials usually are best served by facing their detractors directly. The town manager may also want to provide the mayor with an example of another elected official's conduct that the mayor would agree should not have been defended by staff. The key point to reinforce is that the town manager's role is to serve the entire governing body, not individual members.

Tenet 3 of the ICMA Code of Ethics requires members to act according to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in order that they can gain the respect and confidence of elected officials and the public. It would be inconsistent with Tenet 3 for the town manager to attack a resident's credibility just because that person had complained about an elected official's conduct.

Counting Ballots in a Pinch

Q. Because of the untimely death of a member of Congress, the state has a contentious election coming up. The county anticipates a large number of absentee ballots, and a printing error is expected to cause some complications in tabulating the results. These two factors have created significant pressure on the county, less than a week before the election, to find qualified people to help count the absentee ballots.

Two ICMA members are willing and able to assist but became concerned when they discovered that tabulating teams must be staffed by both a designated Republican and a designated Democrat. Would this requirement to declare a political party to count ballots be a violation of Tenet 7?

A. Designating a political party affiliation in order to count ballots is not a violation of Tenet 7. For one thing, the requirement to designate a political party is arbitrary; not everyone who counts ballots has to declare a party affiliation.

ICMA members may also declare a political party affiliation in order to vote in primaries, although in some states they can vote in political primaries as registered independents.

In this circumstance, the ICMA members are assisting other local government staff in the performance of a local government function.

—Elizabeth Kellar
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Ethics advice is a popular service provided to ICMA members. The ICMA Executive Board members who serve on the Committee on Professional Conduct review the inquiries and advice published in PM magazine. ICMA members who have questions about their obligations under the ICMA Code of Ethics are encouraged to call Martha Perego at 202/962-3668 or Elizabeth Kellar at 202/962-3611.

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On Retirement

Key Principles of Investing for Any Market

As a plan sponsor, you are often faced with difficult questions that relate to the administration of your defined contribution or deferred compensation plan. You need to select a good provider, decide on the funds you will make available, and determine what fees you will pay, among other issues.

But often, one of the toughest questions for you and your staff will come from a participant who, during market volatility, asks, "Where should I invest now?"

For the most part, plan sponsors look to their plan providers to offer essential education for their anxious participants during extended periods of market volatility, which can strain the resolve of the most veteran of market participants.

Still, as a fiduciary, you should know the basic principles of investment and ensure that your provider is educating your participants on the best investment practices to build retirement security. Here is a quick overview of three key concepts.

Invest for the long term. Trying to outguess the stock and bond markets by frequently shifting money between types of asset classes (e.g., stocks to cash, bonds to stocks) is very difficult even for seasoned professionals using sophisticated techniques.

Attempts to time the market probably won't help you very much because securities markets are unpredictable and often move in short, powerful bursts. Because it is so hard to predict when the market will go down and also when it is going to go back up again, many investors who try to time the market end up selling low and re-buying high. It is better to be patient, recognizing that short-term market changes are far less important than long-term trends.

Find the right balance of risk vs. return. Balance describes the mix within your portfolio among different types of investments or, in the case of your retirement savings plan, different types of mutual funds—stock vs. bond vs. stable value. Because different types of investments have different risks associated with them, setting the right asset allocation can help you create the right portfolio to meet your objectives.

Why is it important to build a portfolio with the appropriate mix of asset classes? Different asset classes are expected over long periods of time to deliver different rates of return, react differently to economic changes, and have different levels of risk. Stocks offer the highest returns at the highest risk; bonds deliver lower returns at less risk, while cash provides a minimal risk but with returns that barely keep up with inflation.

By establishing the right mix of stocks, bonds, and cash equivalents, you can create a plan to meet your investment goals within your time frame at a suitable level of comfort.

Diversify your portfolio. We all know the saying, "Don't put all of your eggs in one basket." Experienced investors know this to be particularly important. Since 1929, the market has averaged a return of 10 percent per year, but during that same time there have been many companies that, though once promising, have gone out of business. By holding a diversified portfolio, you ensure that no one company will determine the success or failure of your investment plans.

Most stock mutual funds hold shares in a large number of companies, offering individual investors a degree of diversification they could not achieve on their own. That is why mutual funds are safer investments for investing over the long term. As you build your portfolio, however, you may want to diversify further by selecting mutual funds that have different objectives or styles. Some mutual funds include multiple styles within the fund; this feature offers an additional layer of diversification.

Understanding these key principles of investing will help nervous investors during periods of market volatility.

—Contributed by ICMA-RC Staff
ICMA Retirement Corporation
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APRIL 2008 · VOLUME 90 · NUMBER 3

DEPARTMENTS

Profile



George Purefoy is city manager of [Frisco, Texas](#).

At the bash celebrating his 10th anniversary with the city of Frisco, Texas, a decade ago, staff members and friends gave City Manager George Purefoy and his wife, Debra, a trip to Mexico.

He didn't receive anything quite so glorious at the celebration of his 20th anniversary with the city earlier this month, probably because city council members, staff members, and others thought they couldn't top naming the new city hall after him. The George A. Purefoy Municipal Center was dedicated in September 2006.

The city of Frisco received 75 applications when it advertised for its first city manager. When the city hired Purefoy for the job, he had been city manager in Columbus, Texas, for seven years. The population of Frisco was just under 6,600 when he arrived.

Frisco Independent School District (FISD) Superintendent Rick Reedy said that the district has benefited from the partnerships Purefoy has formed over the years between the city and the district. "George is an astute businessman and a revolutionary type thinker," Reedy said.

The latest partnership between the city and FISD involves the expansion of the Dr Pepper StarCenter that will result in an arena large enough to hold commencement exercises for Frisco high schools. Purefoy has been instrumental in those negotiations.

"He's able to pull the best out of other people," Reedy said. "We tend to think on a higher level when George is involved." The city manager was born and raised in Mineral Wells, Texas. He earned a bachelor's degree in political

science from the University of Texas at Arlington, followed by a master’s degree in public administration from East Texas State University, which is not Texas A&M University–Commerce.

Purefoy worked as a police officer in the city of Arlington, Texas, in the first years after college. At a city council meeting in November 2007, Frisco Police Chief Todd Renshaw presented him with a replica of the badge he wore as an Arlington police officer.

Purefoy served as an administrative assistant for the city of Boerne, Texas, and as city administrator for the city of Taylor Lake Village, Texas, before becoming the city manager for Columbus.

Since Purefoy has been city manager here, Frisco voters have approved a half-cent sales tax. Funds from that tax are used to support the Frisco economic and community development corporations. Both corporations have helped attract major developments to Frisco, including Stonebriar Centre, the Dr Pepper Ballpark and StarCenter, and Pizza Hut Park.

Also under Purefoy’s leadership, the voters approved a \$197.5 million bond package in 2002. That package funded the new city hall, the senior center, and the Frisco Athletic Center.

Purefoy sees continued growth ahead for the city of Frisco in the next decade. “Frisco’s commercial development along the Dallas North Tollway and U.S. 380, as well as continued development along State Highway 121 should prove to be major influences during the next 10 years.

“With continuing emphasis on the downtown area, especially being supplemented by the heritage area and Frisco Square, the ‘small town’ feel should remain. I believe the most important aspect of the ‘small town’ feel is the friendly nature of our citizens, which hopefully always will be present,” Purefoy said.

He is also known for his quiet, but wicked sense of humor. “He’ll see some humor in a real tense situation that no one else will see,” Reedy said.

Reedy said a few years back there was a problem with the lead contaminants in the soil at the Frisco High School agricultural barn from things that had been buried in the ground by a company doing work on the site years before. He said Purefoy made the comment that the pigs raised eating that grass with lead in it ought to have taken first place at the county show that year.

“He’s a much more global and inclusionary thinker than I am,” Reedy said. “He tends to see all the positive things in something for everyone.”

Frisco Mayor Mike Simpson echoes Reedy’s comment. “He has vision and passion to make the vision reality. He has the reputation of being a man of integrity,” Simpson said.

“He has a wickedly dry sense of humor and he remembers what you do,” Mayor Pro Tem Jim Joyner said. Reedy said Purefoy prefers to work behind the scenes and credits God for his abilities and good fortune. Purefoy also credits council members and the residents of Frisco.

“I appreciate the opportunity of seeing what happens with dedication and hard work,” said Purefoy. “Something really special about working with Frisco all these years is having the support of the mayor and city council to do what is right. Having the leadership in place that honors an organization’s word, that is very important to me.”

—Penny Rathbun
Staff Writer
Star Community Newspapers
Frisco, Texas

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APRIL 2008 · VOLUME 90 · NUMBER 3

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ICMA Fund for Professional Management

ICMA Fund for Professional Management

ICMA established its Fund for Professional Management in 1986 to support and promote the council-manager form of government and professional local government management. Investment interest from the fund is used to support communities interested in adopting council-manager government, assist in efforts to retain the council-manager form when it is challenged by ballot referendums, and raise public awareness of the benefits of professional local government management.

Annual contributions ensure that the Fund for Professional Management can continue its good work for the future of the profession. ICMA gratefully acknowledges the following contributions made in 2007 by a record-breaking 632 ICMA members, state associations, and other supporters of the profession.

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