

August 2019 eNews

Presidential Musings From James



Broadband 25 years later

What we have been saying at the local level for 25 years is now firmly embraced by Richmond. Specifically, that high speed Internet access is a touchstone for economic growth and a basic service that should be universal.

We were preaching this in the 90's and when the private sector was slow to move several municipal systems were developed and more were in the pipeline. Bristol deployed a functional network and was praised by state and federal leaders. In 1994 Bedford deployed one of the first cable modem system in the US by partnering with a small local cable company and used the franchise negotiation process as a tool for a win-win partnership. How did the state react? In 1998 it made such municipal broadband systems in Bristol illegal and subsequently took away the cable franchise. The logic was removing controls on or competition with the private sector would speed up high speed Internet deployment. It worked in high density areas. This ban was found to be illegal in 2001 (Bristol sued) so in 2002 they made it legal but outlawed any subsidy of operations. Can you imagine if Richmond decided it would be illegal to run a water or sewer utility with a subsidy?

20 years later exactly what the localities predicted has happened. The private sector has served all the profitable areas and left the rest. Cable franchises prevent such cherry picking but we have no such tool for broadband. The answer out of Richmond isn't to remove the hurdles to municipal entry, or give us franchise tools to incentivize service but to authorize localities to borrow money to give to private sector entitles to deploy high speed Internet. This deserves a "SMH". The \$19 million earmarked for this is specifically to go to the private sector, leveraged by local debt! It is also precisely the localities that need the funds for broadband that have the least ability to provide the leverage.

Remember when we determined that telephone service should be universal and that the private sector was to do it? We applied a universal service fee and tied serving profitable areas to serving rural areas. Everyone got a telephone and the private sector did it largely due to the Communications Act of 1934.

In 1996 the Communications Act was updated by the Telecommunications Act and there was some daylight in the possibility that universal service requirements could be applied to high speed Internet access through the Connect America Fund and the Lifeline fund. The US was poised to apply Universal Service Fund dollars to Internet access projects right until the current FCC chairman took office.

The point of all this is that we wired the US for voice simply, efficiently and with the private sector and we still have the framework of enabling federal acts to do that. The barrier to Broadband isn't

mountains, hills and distance, it is the FCC and the telecommunications lobby. The political will to alter the \$8 billion annual service fund dollars away from existing carriers that use it to prop up their current businesses and towards broadband deployment would go further than any other action. TracFone gets in line for its half billion annual subsidy just like all the others and they lobby hard to see that Universal Service Fund dollars don't go to new players or new services. Moving these dollars to broadband would mean a big big change in who gets a spot at the trough and that is the work at hand. Some intrepid Congress Members and Senators have tried since 1996 and been shutdown at every turn. Not reallocating the \$8 billion annual spending for universal telecommunications service towards broadband deployment because the existing telecommunications lobby won't give up their funding and instead asking struggling localities to borrow funds to accomplish this is an insult to the taxpayer. The same group lobbied to keep the \$19 million in state money earmarked for them.

Like everything else, we will roll up our sleeves and get'r done. But just once, wouldn't it be nice to get help from the Federal and State levels on such issues?

Please join me in welcoming our newest VLGMA members: Roger Keren, Citizen Engagement Manager, Oracle; Mark Lauzier, MIT; India Adams, Assistant City Manager, City of Petersburg; Casey Armstrong, Assistant County Administrator, County of Rockingham; Megan Aubrey, Director of Administration, Bedford Regional Water Authority; Don Unmussig, County Administrator, County of Cumberland; Donna Patterson, Director of Elections, City of VA Beach; Christine Lewis, Deputy Registrar, City of Virginia Beach; Paige Lynch, Police Officer, County of Roanoke; Charles Boyles, Executive Director Thomas Jefferson PDC; Eric Dahl, County Administrator, County of Fluvanna and Patsy Budd, Clerk/Treasurer, Town of Gretna.

[Contact James Ervin](#)

The Search for a City Manager...



The Search for a City Manager: a Profile in Civility...
Drew Williams, AICP
The Berkley Group

When City Manager Noah Simon departed Lexington, Virginia for Westlake, Texas earlier this year, he left an open seat in a community that prides itself on history and culture, but also – civility. What a novel concept in this era of division and rancor! Almost an anachronism itself, you ask residents about what makes Lexington a special place and a common response is – civility. It is a community that isn't afraid to disagree from time to time, but how they do so makes the difference.

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ICMA Annual Conference - MITs

ICMA's Annual Conference will be held in Nashville, Tennessee from October 20th through the 23rd. MITs as in previous years will be granted complimentary registration.

This year in addition to this professional development benefit,

ICMA has a limited amount of funds available to provide conference travel assistance stipends to our members who are in transition to offset travel related expenses. If you are interested in receiving a stipend please contact me by email at rceasar@icma.org. Your email should specify your estimated total travel costs, the portion you will be able to cover and the amount you are requesting from ICMA.



Rosalyn Ceasarm Senior Program Manager, MIT & Senior Advisor Programs, Member Benefits & Services

Tedd's Take



Surprising America

Much has been written of late about the rise of racism, shockingly anti-social behaviors, the differing political positions of the "educated" versus "under-educated," xenophobia, angry old white men, socialism, communism, and the list goes on.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

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Civic Engagement



Citizen Engagement and Citizen Participation: Are They The Same Thing?

Citizen Engagement and Citizen Participation are the same thing right? On the surface they sound similar enough, but are they really the same? Both may have the same desired outcome: a government that better serves its citizens, but they are not the same.

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A DAO in the Life - Michelle Bixler

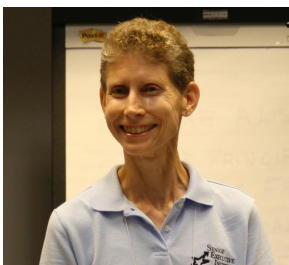


Employees - An Untapped Resource in Building Trust

There is no shortage of articles in the public sector sphere about how open, clear communication builds trust in our communities. Every Community, U.S.A. has the word “transparency” built into their council goals somewhere, and the good ones even have steps for what that might look like. (Nice, Winchester!) There are even myriad private sector firms, usually in the technology realm, that can help government entities communicate and engage the public with their budgeting, decision making processes and more. This brief will discuss one avenue (and a couple strategies) that is often an untapped well of opportunity for building trust in the community - employees.

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Mel's Poetry Corner



Wonder

Statistics capture the static.
Take a leap into the ecstatic.
Finite, limited resources are turned around
when creativity is found.

The determined and set cannot predict
what the power of infinite possibility can elicit.

Open mindedness befriends the unknown
and seeds of opportunity are grown.
Passion, exploration, wonder, inspiration stimulate
the appetite to create.

Stay open today and perhaps
a fresh idea grasp.
Instead of being a statistic
invite the mystic.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)



Position Changes And Other Events

July 2019

- Krystal Onaitis, a senior policy advisor for the Virginia Health Department and previously the customer relationships management program manager for the city of Richmond, has been appointed city manager for Covington.

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