

January 2020 eNews

Presidential Musings From James



Short Problems, Long Problems

I hope everyone had a very joyous break from work with great fellowship and reconnection with family and loved ones. For me, I have a tree up, a load of firewood and a kid that flies in from Japan on the 22nd!

I also hope you are all through your 2nd amendment struggles. If you have been living under a rock, search for “Virginia Second Amendment Sanctuary” and get a dose of what is heading our way. I would love to go on about how this scares the heck out of me, wherein localities that lean to one direction politically advise that they may not enforce laws passed by a state assembly that leans in another direction politically or on how this is a problem that we have to solve as the demographics at play will result in urbanized areas controlling most state houses and federal positions within the next two decades. We will have to grapple with this but for now let’s see how it unfolds in Richmond.

What I am interested in is the rapidity in which this happened in many localities. Many of our localities are suffering from what I call “bureaucratic rigidity”. They don’t move or react very fast. Policy and solutions take months, commissions, study and consideration. In many cases the 2nd amendment consideration broke through that! How? Why? These are not facetious questions as we get policy done for a living, so learning from this might salvage something from the struggle.

Is it getting 1% of your citizens to speak up on an issue what gets it around the usual bureaucratic stiffness? I think that is part of it, but not all of it. Okay, a big part of it. If I could get a room full of people advocating for fair and sustainable utility rates, I would think I passed on over the rainbow bridge. The question morphs into more “why do people come out and advocate for one thing versus another?”

I can guarantee you that more people in my community are concerned with access to healthcare, the care of the elderly, workforce training, mental health and even public amenities like parks and recreation facilities than this one issue. Some say it is because they trust our handling of those issues but I think it is more how we are wired.

I think it connects to the human’s natural draw to acute issues versus chronic issues. All of us, citizenry and elected folks combined, are very good at “this is a problem, let’s fix it now” and we struggle with “this is a problem that will take a decade to fix, let’s get started”. Think I am out in left field? Consider our standard MO for disasters: We are great at acute compassion (after the disaster we will donate, volunteer, fund and be a part of helping) but very bad at issues that require chronic empathy (solving hunger and homelessness without a disaster associated with it). If something bad happens, we are able to manifest interest and compassion, but when that something bad continues for years and years, the empathy gets thin and we are not as moved to action. In many ways it is how we are wired. It is not a bad thing and connects to our fight or flight response, but as a community versus individually. Chronic issues present a set of challenges that play to our weaknesses. Acute issues play to our strengths. Certainly you have a staff member who does great work on acute issues but struggles with long term ones? The “I do my best work under

pressure” type?

So why go down this path (going from the 2nd amendment issue to this is indeed full of twists and turns)? One thing we can learn with this is you can move your agenda forward on chronic issues “if” you can draw upon the community’s ability to see them as acute. If you talk about needed action “right now”, you might just get it. If you talk about a decade long solution, then your army of helpers gets smaller. Want to tackle hunger? Talk about feeding people Monday Night, not about solving the issue. If you tackle the problem of breaking down a chronic issue into tactical acute encounters as a leader, you may make progress.

We already do this without recognizing it (food drives, clean up days and etc.). Take on the leadership role of leveraging “right now” action, but stacking it up so that it makes a consistent but measurable impact to the chronic problem. People want to be heroes and part of a solution, so create opportunities to be active succinctly that at the same time makes a big long term impact. One last example: I was able to get ten volunteers to help put a roof on a house because it was leaking and needed to be fixed right now. I can’t get ten volunteers to sign up for a program to address dilapidated housing stock, but I can get people to come help with singular acute and tactical issues. If I organize ten of these a year, the chronic problem is addressed, but the participants are only focused on the acute problem. Neat huh?

[Contact James Ervin](#)

2020 VLGMA Winter Conference



From VLGMA Winter Conference Co-Chairs Ande Banks and Ashton Harrison:

Balancing leadership and management is the underlying theme of the 2020 VLGMA Winter Conference to be held February 12-14, 2020 in Charlottesville.

[Read More](#)

Upcoming ICMA Events



[Leadership ICMA Class of 2021 starts May 17-24, 2020 College of Charleston, SC](#)

Class of 2021 will begin their leadership journey by attending the ICMA Leadership Academy May 17-22, 2020 at the College of Charleston, SC with seasoned managers.

[ICMA Athenian Project October 11-17, 2020 Airlie House, Virginia](#)

Participants embark on a 9-month journey to transmit their self, their community, and the profession greater and more beautiful than each was transmitted to them as they connect with other servant leaders, re-ignite their passion, define their legacy, and gain a stronger understanding of the responsibility behind the defining questions of... If not you, who will lead in these times? If not now, when?

[ICMA Gettysburg Leadership Institute May 13-15, 2020](#)

With civil unrest and growing leadership challenges we think of the 3-day battle of Gettysburg and get curious about the problems faced there that mirror our challenges in public sector leadership today.

Tedd's Take

New Year, New Start

By now you may have received notice from the Virginia Institute of Government/Weldon Cooper Center that the EBIS (email broadcast information service) and the contract services performed by the Institute for the VLGMA have been formally transferred from me to Charles Hartgrove, the Institute’s new associate director. We agreed to



finalize the transition in December so that the changes would be completed by the beginning of the new year.

[Contact Tedd Povar](#)

[Read More](#)

A DAO in the Life



Forging a Collaborating Partnership with Internal Services:

A solutions-based approach to getting results and building relationships.

By James Baker, Retired City Manager and Laura Fitzpatrick, Deputy City Manager, City of Chesapeake

The internal services departments play a critical role in all aspects of the world of work. This role feels especially significant in local government, given the stewardship of public funds and transparency principles that guide everything we do. Tension exists in all municipal organizations as employees work to deliver services within the constraints of the regulatory departments. The internal service teams help protect the City by complying with laws, ensuring equity, and reducing risk. Yet, frustrations can arise as departments get impatient working within these constraints. Hiring managers seeking the best person to fill a key role bump up against the constraints of human resources salary and recruitment rules. Subject matter experts in a department become frustrated when legal and procurement teams do not authorize their request and stated justification for a sole source procurement. In addition, nearly every line department chafes at delays caused by bureaucratic, internal service processes.

[Read More](#)

Civic Engagement - Local Government Education Week



Local Government Education Week

The first week in April is designated as Local Government Education Week in the Commonwealth of Virginia. During this week I encourage all of you to make an extra effort to reach out to your schools to see if you can get involved. We are all ambassadors of our profession, and this week is a great time to get in front of students to make sure they are aware of the wonderful careers that await them in local government. Ways to get involved can be as simple as volunteering to read a book to an elementary class for story time, or as complex as hosting a high school government class for a day.

[Read More](#)

Mel's Poetry Corner

Be Here Now

Savoring this moment, now rushing at all,
smelling the coffee, all life's blessings, recall.
By giving now full attention, by forgetting future dates
there is a sublime opening of the mind's floodgates.
Everything changes for the realization has sunk in



that there is no end to what we begin,
that our work is not to get somewhere, somehow
but to BE right here, right now.
No longer are we desperate to arrive
for it is much too fun soaring on this magic carpet ride.
And looking around, we might even see
beyond the eye's horizon and catch a glimpse of infinity.

[Contact Mel Gillies](#)



Position Changes And Other Events

December 2019

- Jay Taliaferro has been named city manager of Salem. He has served as acting city manager since January and started working with the city in 1991.
- Bryan David, Orange County administrator since 2014, was terminated by the Board of Supervisors.
- Darlene Burcham, Clifton Forge town manager since 2010, and former city manager of Roanoke, did not have her contract extended by the town council. The contract will expire on June 30, 2020.
- Kimberly Alexander, Elkton town manager since May 1, 2019, resigned from the position effective December 3rd.
- Mike Murphy, Charlottesville deputy city manager, retired on December 6th after a 25-year career with the city.

[Overview](#) · [Membership](#) · [Resources](#) · [News](#) · [Events](#) · [Sponsors](#) · [ICMA](#)

[Contact Us](#)

