

THE ADMINISTRATOR

A PUBLICATION OF THE N.C. CITY & COUNTY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

AUGUST 2013, ISSUE 8

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

As the N.C City & County Management Association enters the 50th year of existence as a merged (city and county) association, it is as good a time as any to reflect on the profession. And who better to look back than some of the association's past leadership.

Several past presidents were asked a series of questions. In *The Administrator*, throughout the rest of 2013 and into 2014, we'll take a look at their

answers.

This month's question: *What led you to become a local government manager? (Edited for space.)*

Lane Bailey, Lenoir:

"During my senior year at Appalachian State University (ASU), I was planning to apply to law school but not certain if I wanted to practice law. I visited a colleague of mine, Jeff Emory, who was doing an internship in the town of Troy. He showed me

around town and explained what he was doing and I decided then that I wanted to go into

local government. I went back to ASU and talked to several advisors who encouraged me to come back the following year and get my MPA. I did that and



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ICMA SPOTLIGHT: RODNEY DICKERSON

Rodney Dickerson is the assistant town manager of Garner, recently named an All-America City. In the town of 26,000 residents, his portfolio includes risk management, budget, problem solving, service delivery, and team projects, among others. He specializes in providing quality customer service and sees this as the core principal of his local government service.

As local governments emerge from the economic downturn, Dickerson sees a



challenge for ICMA members in growing their communities and positioning them for prosperity. "Many of us have sustained and maintained a consistent level of service in spite of flat to falling

revenues. The town of Garner has had many successes over the last several years and now the focus is on translating that into economic development and tax base growth."

He continues, "As each year passes, there seems to be less trust in government, much of which trickled down from national and state politics. As

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The Administrator is a monthly newsletter of the North Carolina City and County Management Association, a professional association for city and county managers and assistant managers from counties and municipalities throughout the state of North Carolina.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

99th ICMA Annual Conference

Boston

September 22-25, 2013

2014 N.C. City & County Management Association Winter Seminar

Sheraton Research Triangle Park

February 5-7, 2014

2014 N.C. City & County Management Association Summer Seminar

Charlotte

June 19-21, 2014

THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND

By Gwendolyn Harvey

The worst thing about my retiring from local government is realizing how much I remember and miss people from my working



days.

Especially the people, who like the Jack Nicholson character in the film "As

Good as it Get", admits begrudgingly, **"Made me want to be a better person"**. There were many in my public service career. The challenge is not where to start but where to stop.

The deputy city manager who guffawed when a twenty-something budget analyst remarked quizzically, so why award a contract to the lowest bidder, and sell a property to the highest bidder. He had thousands of opportunities to send me out of his office, out of the organization, back to graduate school. The time I wanted engraved initials on my daily planner cover; thought I should substitute for him at an ICMA annual conference he suddenly could not attend;

complained after the fourth rewrite on an agenda item that maybe he could just do it himself. I always used his last name simply because I liked the sound. I brought the most horrid "health" food to his office birthday parties. Oh, did I vex him. He was relieved years later when I set off for the next job. **"Well, she's much better than when I found her..."**

A county manager and former Marine who taught his novice assistant discipline: Accountability: Don't let stuff float. Create a master cabinet mounted on wheels to pull to their attention or push in their face. Alternatives: Don't box the sheriff in. He can build a better one himself. Action: Don't sit when you can stand and stroll down to the tax office. He could run laps around the park all morning, and rings around the unprepared in meetings all afternoon. He helped save me from myself – meandering memos; crappy presentations; stale pastries (The Board Chair owned a bakery.) He sent me to Public

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ETHICS: ASK BEFORE YOU ASK

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Good decisions result from correct and complete information, an understanding of the environment, a clear picture of the desired end, and good judgment. Part of having good judgment is the willingness to test your proposed action plan with others.

When it comes to ethical decision making, testing your solutions with an objective source can detect any bias that may prevent you from selecting the most appropriate course. Many members seek advice from ICMA's ethics adviser, as the following three exchanges demonstrate.

Q: After many years in the profession, I am on the radar of two organizations interested in diversifying the membership of their boards. Both are national

organizations with no footprint in the community. Both organizations, one a nonprofit and the other a for-profit, pay their directors. What ethical concerns should I consider if I decide to accept an offer?

A: The good news is that since these two entities have no direct connection to the community, you would be avoiding what is typically the most significant ethical concern a manager faces when he or she volunteers to serve on a board: dealing with the conflicts of interest in fact or appearance that occur when the volunteer organization has some official interaction with the municipality.

What you do on your personal time matters though. After all, your reputation, and by association, that of your employer, are in play here. As you vet any offers, consider these questions: Do you support the organization's mission? Does it operate in an ethical manner and how do you know? Does it share your values? Would you be proud to be part of the organization's board, even if it runs into trouble?

Finally, as with any outside employment, notify your employer; comply with any internal regulations on outside employment; and be sure that all extracurricular activity occurs on your own time.

Q: I am a town/gown city manager. Our youngest child has been accepted by the local university. It makes financial sense in this housing market to purchase a home for his use for the next four years. To make it financially feasible, he would need to have one or two roommates.

We have no interest in being landlords in the long run so would sell the house when he graduates. If we proceed with this plan, would I be violating the prohibition on real estate speculation outlined in the guidelines for Tenet 12? Does renting rooms to other students constitute a business investment that should be avoided?

A: With regard to making real estate purchases in the community where you work, both intent and purpose are important. The guideline's underlying principle is that

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members should not seek out real estate investments in the community where they work for the purpose of making money. And certainly not use confidential information for personal benefit.

Buying rental property because you are looking for business income is different than buying rental property to house your family. The first activity is entirely optional and should be avoided. The second is a legitimate necessity, and for that reason, is okay. Any increase in the value that occurs over four years is appreciation rather than profit from speculation.

It's important to disclose why the purchase is being made and to manage any potential conflicts that may arise in your new role as a landlord dealing with city services. Convincing your son and his housemates to be good (and quiet) neighbors will go a long way in making this effort work.

Q: The county hired a management consultant to work under contract with our leadership team to provide executive coaching. This

consultant also wrote a book on leadership that is centered on his inspiring personal story. In addition to the consulting work, he conducts book talks around the country for a variety of organizations and groups. He typically sells some books at each of the talks.

Because the content is so relevant to the work that we do, I hosted a book talk for my staff. Since this was training, we paid a small fee to the consultant to conduct the talk.

The management consultant has now asked me to sign a letter discussing our experience with the book talk and recommending the presentation to other local government managers. The letter would direct them to the consultant's website, and it would also include my phone number and contact information. Would this letter of recommendation violate the ICMA Code of Ethics?

A: As with most ethical scenarios, this one is not exactly black and white. Under the endorsement guideline for Tenet 12, you can endorse a book by encouraging colleagues to read it or even write a note for the

book jacket.

But a book talk facilitated by the author for a fee is really a professional development event. Members can endorse a professional development service but only those provided by nonprofit membership organizations or recognized educational institutions. They can't endorse professional development activities provided by consultants because they are considered a commercial service.

The best course here is for you, as manager, to decline the request to write the letter of recommendation for the book-talk presentation. To do so would be to get too close to the line on endorsing a service. Because the book's message resonated with staff, consider writing an article for a professional publication like this magazine. That is an entirely acceptable way to share the inspiring story.

Facing an ethical dilemma? Remember to ask before you act.

Martha Perego
 ICMA Ethics Director
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THOSE WE LEAVE BEHIND, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Works to face the rowdy; Parks and Recreation Department to chasten the silly; and Library to shelve the ridiculous, and cheerfully awaited the consequence. He'd be humming, **"If you're good enough to get in..."**

A city manager who exposed the definition of schizophrenia: Trying to endure a near psychotic mayor and endear a recalcitrant staff. Affirm the council clerk-of-the-month club. Disentangle public and private disputes no matter how absurd. Deliver a rose to even a cranky administrative assistant on Valentine's. Aptly dress as the Riddler on Halloween. He was a sensitive, sophisticated city manager too soon shown the door. I was the anxious and apprehensive assistant he helped move on. Never was there a "better him

than me" moment. He was always better. My admiration and appreciation of him through the years are unabated.

A county manager who asked by the way I tendered one assignment was I a displaced social worker. **A city manager** who chortled, "a little headstrong, are we now?"

A colleague hired by the budget and evaluation office a month after me. I remember him making the round of introductions. He was what women today call a "hunk": brawny, blue-eyed soul, with dimples deep as ditches. He would lift secretaries (they were called that back then) off their feet, twirling them around the room, (before we knew that was sexual harassment) in a laughing fit. He had his serious side of course. I saw him chasing alongside the mayor

with a clipboard and earnest expression more than once. He took a yearlong, cross-country sabbatical. I told him it was to stifle a romantic relationship. He told me he wanted to see how other cities worked. His longest stay was the city of Visalia, California. The city he committed to was Grand Rapids, Michigan. We weren't really rivals. We just wanted to be better than **all** the rest. Unlike me, he went on to become a manager in Delaware, Florida, and briefly, North Carolina. Duncan died on July 6, 2013 six months shy of age 62.

Retirement gives you time to reminiscence and reflect – the good times, bad times, and in-between times. For better or worse, I got by. We all do. What doesn't make you better somehow isn't worth remembering, is it?

meaningful ways."

DICKERSON, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

local government managers, it is our job to instill public trust through our dialogue and our actions. We do this by providing quality, value-added services that show our taxpayers we have their best interest at heart.

It is important to me as an assistant town manager and ICMA member that our profession gets the respect that it deserves. Every day, we touch the lives of others in our communities in positive and

Dickerson is participating in the last few months of the [Leadership ICMA](#) program. "The program has enriched my career by allowing me to assess and

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never looked back.”

Pete Connet, retired: “I was working with the old Urban Renewal Programs in Clinton and it dawned on me that once the



project(s) were completed I would be out of a job. I enjoyed working with

the city staffs in my previous Redevelopment Commission jobs and wanted to continue in public service, which I really enjoyed. I was working with the Clinton Redevelopment Commission when the current manager encouraged me to attend the Municipal Administration Course at the-then Institute of Government. Soon after completing the course, the Clinton city manager decided to take another job in a larger city. I knew the current council members and they knew me. They encouraged me to apply for the Clinton city manager position in the fall of 1974 and the rest is history.”

John Ed Whitehurst, retired: “I was working with a local government auditing firm and felt that I would enjoy the

profession and the experiences of working with and for the public: Striving to meet the needs that became necessary to make life easier for the public that we served.”

Cal Horton, retired: “I took a course in municipal government from Donald Hayman when I was a junior in college in 1966. Dr. Hayman was an Assistant Director of the Institute of Government and a Professor in the Political Science Department



at UNC-Chapel Hill. Part of the course involved our class preparing a

mock budget for the City of Charlotte, conducting research on site with several departments, and making a budget presentation to department heads as if they were the council. It was interesting. That summer, Charlotte offered two undergraduate internships. I got one of them, Curtis Branscome the other. The city manager, Bill Veeder, and Personnel Director Bob Earle, made sure that we had a good experience. Curtis and I were hooked for life.”

Jim Hipp, retired: “I enjoyed an excellent experience in college working in the planning department of the City of Spartanburg (S.C.). From there, following a time on active duty with the U.S. Army, I was encouraged by my uncle, John Weatherly, then serving as a county commissioner in Catawba County, to pursue planning or local government as a career. I was fortunate to land a job with the city of Lenoir and was both mentored and challenged by Lewis Price, then city manager, to maximize my experience in that organization and pursue my professional aspirations to become a local government manager.”

Jerry Ayscue, Vance County: “My public service career began in Social Services and it only took a few months to realize that local government



management was where I wanted to be. It offered the opportunity to make a viable difference in the lives of people while pursuing personal

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career goals. An initial priority was at the end of my career I wanted to be able to look back with satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment that my efforts improved the quality of life for others. I did not want to become absorbed into a large company or organization without being able to know my work was making a positive impact on people. Service in local

government offered that chance."

Jack Neel, retired: "I first became interested while I was still in high school from my father-in-law. He was Town Engineer at Pearisburg, Va., in the 1940s. When I entered Va. Tech in 1948 there was no MPA-type curricular, so I took civil engineering, which is what most CMs were in those days. After

graduation and two years active duty in the Army, wanted to get my MS and I did it in Sanitary Engineering, still no MPA available. I got the MS on 6/10/56. It took me until 7/1/57 to find a town manager position. I helped start Manager-Council in Tazewell, Va., then. I moved to Roxboro, N.C. 9/1/59. Moved to Albemarle, N.C. 3/1/67."

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improve my leadership skills, and has given me the opportunity to meet some really talented people. I encourage anyone who is aspiring to be a local government manager to take advantage of this program and [others offered through ICMA.](#)" Through the program, he attended the [Senior Executive Institute at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service](#) at the University of Virginia. He appreciates that "SEI blends local government professionals in various stages of their careers and allows for the sharing of ideas and for peer evaluation."

He has found ICMA valuable for his own professional growth and also as a resource for town staff. "The [annual conference](#) is a

'one-stop shop' of information and networking. I am fortunate to be in an organization where professional development is encouraged by elected officials and management alike. Even in a difficult fiscal environment, our town leaders recognize that this is the time to learn new ideas and practices to make us more efficient in service delivery." Town staff have participated in [ICMA webinars](#) and read [ICMA publications](#), mainly centered on budget prioritization, succession planning, and dealing with outside agencies. "These resources have improved our organization and helped prepare us for the challenges ahead."

Dickerson, an [ICMA member](#)

since 2006, earned his bachelor's degree in economics/history from [Duke University](#) in 1990. Shortly after graduation, he worked in the home construction industry. He began his municipal career in 1992, working as a code enforcement official for the [town of Cary, N.C.](#) Municipal service inspired him to obtain his MPA, which he completed in 2001 at [North Carolina State University](#). Dickerson has served on the executive committee of the [North Carolina City/County Management Association](#) and he is currently the chair of the state conference program committee. He also recently served as the local government appointee to the [North Carolina State Building Commission](#).