

THE ADMINISTRATOR

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

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SOMETHING OF SIGNIFICANCE?

Making an impact. It's something that just about everyone who gets into local government management hopes to do with his or her career. After all, the people who dedicate themselves to the profession do jobs that affect the lives of everyone in their communities.

Some are also able to have an impact on the N.C. City & County Management Association (NCCCMA), whether it be by participating as a member or serving on a committee. And the fortunate few are able to lead the association as a president.

The Administrator continues its question-and-answer session with some past presidents of the NCCCMA as they reflect on the 50th anniversary of the organization.

This month's question: *What is the most significant thing that occurred during your time as president? (Edited for space.)*

Lewis Price, Lenoir city council: "At my age, I have a hard time remembering what happened last week, much less 30 years ago. I don't remember anything significant that occurred. We may have started working toward bringing the first ICMA Conference to Charlotte during my tenure."

Carolyn Carter, Life Member: "I think the most

significant thing that happened during my year as president of the Association (1992-93) was the publication of 'Local Government in North Carolina' by Gordon Whitaker. This was the result of the leadership of the Civic Education Committee of our Association.

"The publication of a textbook for use in all high schools in North Carolina was born out of a meeting of several managers during a summer meeting following a session in which it was pointed out to us that the only reference to city/county managers in the textbook used in Social Studies in N.C. high schools explained that 'people who became city and county managers were people who had failed in the business world.' (I promise you I did not make that up!)

"A group of us got together after that session and agreed that our Association could change that sorry state of affairs. A Civic Education Committee was formed and it led to the easiest fundraising campaign in history. It was called the 'Nickel Offense' and raised several hundred thousand dollars for the publication of the textbook. Dr. Gordon Whitaker of the UNC School of Government wrote the book, the Association paid for the publication of the book, and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction supported the effort by distributing the book.

"The book continues in publication and the Civic Education Program now includes curriculum for elementary schools, templates for citizen academies and a summer seminar for social studies teachers.

"I think that this program needs our support now more than ever to help raise citizens who have trust in local government. I think the most powerful antidote to the anti-government movement that is so much a part of the current political landscape is education. I think that being a part of seeing that children are exposed to accurate information about local government and that adults have the chance to learn more about their local government through such programs as citizen academies is an important function of our Association.

"For years, I chaired the Civic Education Committee and when I stood up to give our report at the annual Business Meeting, I always said, 'here is the report from our little plan to save the democracy.' It always got a laugh but it is funny no longer."

Dee Freeman, Life Member: "The 'Text Book Project' was ... a long-term legacy project for the association that

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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.

For comments or suggestions, please contact Matt Lail, editor, at 919-819-3979, or email at collards12@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

ICMA 100th Annual Conference

Charlotte
September 14-17, 2014

PARTNERING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY ON CODE ENFORCEMENT

Alliance For Innovation webinar December 12, 2013; 1 p.m.

Delivering code enforcement services to a community is a balance between maintaining a good relationship with your current residents and achieving your goals for safety, cleanliness, upkeep and the general image of the municipality. Recent issues, such as high foreclosure and unemployment rates, are often combined with the age-old issues of a lack of understanding (amongst citizens, business owners, property owners and residential tenants) of the community's codes and policies or how to achieve compliance quickly and inexpensively. Many citizens also experience a disconnect between the knowledge of rural codes versus urban codes. All of these factors create challenging tasks for code enforcement officers.

Often, there is no magic "silver bullet" when it comes to increasing code compliance. Code Enforcement serves multiple purposes, to:

- Ensure safety within the community,
- Maintain a high quality of life, and to
- Create an environment conducive to economic development

Enforcing these standards establish the foundation to build a better quality of life for your residents and are part of the core services provided by local governments.

The suggestions covered in this webinar will not be a prescription of what community leaders should be doing now, but rather are meant to provide an overview of best practices adopted by other communities to deal with code enforcement challenges.

By participating in this webinar, you will learn about:

- Best practices being used by various communities
- Innovative programs that engage all stakeholders in the community
- Proactive approaches to the enforcement of the city's municipal codes
- Requirements to create a successful code enforcement program
- Inspection performance metrics and measurement targets

About the Speaker: Reginald W. Meigs, C.B.O., Building/Safety Manager, HR Green Governmental Services. Reggie Meigs has over 46 years of experience in Government Service of which 39 years have been in delivering Building and Safety Related services to public agencies. He is a Project Manager and directs and manages the Building and Safety Services for HR Green California. He leads services that include code enforcement, plan check, permit issuance, permit inspections, and counter services. In addition, he oversees and administers HR Green California's neighborhood preservation services that include housing and code enforcement.

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ETHICS: ADVOCATING FOR YOUR PERSONAL CAUSE

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A national organization notified a city of its plans to open a branch in one of the city's booming commercial districts. The nature of the business as well as the location required a special permit. Due to a unique provision in the city charter, the city manager was the only official who was authorized to grant or deny the special permit. Sounds like just another routine administrative task for the manager, right?

Except that the national organization was Planned Parenthood. Given the organization's mission, public engagement on this issue would be anything but routine. Whatever the manager's decision, the connection of the issue to Planned Parenthood would bring out vocal supporters as well as detractors.

To further complicate matters, the manager privately supports Planned Parenthood's work. She has been a consistent albeit modest financial donor to the organization. But she has never publicly stated her support for the organization or worked in any official volunteer capacity.

Managing Ethics and "Optics"

- The manager is absolutely confident that her personal support of the applicant will not

impair her professional judgment in reaching an objective decision based on the merits of the case. That said, the manager is concerned about these ethics and perceptions of the situation:

- Does the manager have an ethical obligation to disclose her personal support of the organization? If she does so before making her decision, is she acknowledging that her capacity to make an objective decision is flawed—that her professional decision will be influenced by her personal position?
- How will the council and/or the public view her decision if it is later disclosed that she personally supported Planned Parenthood?
- How will she respond now or later if asked for her personal opinion on the merits of Planned Parenthood's mission? Does she have a right to keep her personal views and activities private? Is it ethical to decline to answer such an inquiry?
- Was the city manager wrong to provide personal support for an organization whose mission is so politically divisive? Does privately supporting a cause undermine the public's confidence in the manager and the office?
- What advice does the ICMA Code of Ethics offer on personal advocacy?

All are difficult questions to resolve.

The Debate

For decades, the Code of Ethics has acknowledged a professional's right to voice his or her opinion on public issues. As to the specifics, the guidance was limited to the topics of how to assist the governing body in the presentation of issues or what to do when asked for help to promote the council-manager form of government.

The code did not address members' rights and responsibilities if they wanted to advocate on behalf of an issue of personal concern in their private life and outside the scope of their official position.

The profession's dialogue this year on the relevancy of Tenet 7 ignited the debate about whether it's really ok for a professional working in local government to advocate on behalf of issues of personal concern. Tenet 7 of the code advises members to refrain from all political activities that undermine public confidence in professional administrators.

In this era of polarized politics, what can be more "political" than publicly announcing your stance on gun control, abortion, immigration, marriage equality, or any number of other contentious public issues. Make a donation to an organization that advocates for an issue or find yourself on the opposite side of the issue with your elected officials or the community, and the political heat just escalates.

Members even debated the

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perils of simply being a member of an organization that publicly advocates a position. How do you maintain your status as a “politically neutral” professional in a culture where you quickly get assigned to a political box based on just one or a few associations?

But the majority of members also recognized the need for balance and judgment. People drawn to public service have a heightened awareness and commitment to social issues. They understand the connection between policies and programs and their impact on the people in the communities they serve. Given that, how do you ask deeply committed and informed public professionals to just stand down?

New Guidance on Issue Advocacy

Based on the dialogue, the ICMA Committee on Professional Conduct recommended adding a guideline to address issue advocacy that takes place outside the day job. The final version of the guideline, approved by the ICMA Executive Board in September 2013, states:

“Personal Advocacy of Issues. Members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to voice their opinion on public issues. Members may advocate for issues of personal interest only when doing so does not conflict with the performance of their official duties.”

In drafting this guideline, committee members had three goals. First, they wanted to make it clear that members are free to express their opinion on public issues. Second, they wanted to reinforce the concept of balance and restraint required of all those who serve the public.

Third, they recognize that you, the professional on the ground, must assume responsibility to assess whether your advocacy on a public issue undermines your effectiveness in the community you chose to serve.

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spanned the terms of a number of board members and presidents. I was privileged to have a small part in this effort as president of the association. What a success it was in bringing accurate and informative information to the educational system on local government management.”

Jerry Ayscue, Vance County: “NCCCMA further strengthened its relationship with ICMA and supported increased personal and professional development, including credentialing of professional managers.”

Jack Neel, Life Member: “Not a big thing but I designed the first letterhead while I was president. I had to get permission from ICMA to use the old ‘Square in a Circle’ logo.

“I remember hiring Tom Worley as an assistant and he was one of the first graduates of the MPA program at UNC-CH.”

Cal Horton, Life Member: “I was president of the NCCCMA in 1998-99. At the beginning of my term, we lost the services of Terry Henderson, who for many years had been our very dependable Major Domo. The excellent services that he provided to the association had greatly expanded over time, all without benefit of any written understanding with the North Carolina League of Municipalities. Debra Henzey, with the agreement of the Association of County Commissioners Director Ron Aycock, immediately stepped into the very big breach left by Terry’s departure. She did a superb job and kept us going until Henry Lancaster took over the work with the blessing of

Ellis Hankins. We formalized our relationships with the NCLM and the NCACC during the course of the year.

“Immediately after I accepted the president’s gavel, I announced to those gathered at the summer conference that my only objective for the year was to keep the Association from going completely to Hell after the loss of Terry Henderson. My comment drew a big laugh from the audience. But, it was the truth.

“We survived and prospered with the help of Ron and Ellis.”

Pete Connet, Life Member: “That was almost 30 years ago. I guess I am having one of those ‘senior moments’ and can’t recall anything significant.”