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On the Cover:

The Alabama League of Municipalities uses targeted and topic specific surveys for a data driven approach to identify the needs of Alabama's municipalities. League staff is diligent about developing surveys that: 1) respect our members' time and 2) only request necessary information. Responses to League surveys greatly expand our ability to collect accurate information and communicate that information to state and federal policy makers.

League Offers Excellent Training Opportunities

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

Last summer, elections were held in roughly 90 percent of the municipalities across the state of Alabama. From those elections, we now have a host of new municipal officials, as well as many incumbents. I want to welcome each of you and thank you for your commitment to public service, the League and our state.

Shortly after the elections, our team hosted a three-day event in Montgomery which included an Orientation Conference that is presented every four years to municipal officials and features the top legal and administrative authorities on municipal government in Alabama. Topics included general powers of municipalities, duties of the mayor and council, municipal finances and the Open Meetings Act as well as required ethics training via the Alabama Ethics Commission. The role of the League, special programs and advocacy engagement were also discussed. In addition to the Orientation Conference, we hosted our Municipal Leadership Institute (MLI) which focused on economic and community development challenges and opportunities, including topics that explored recovering from the impact of COVID-19 on tourism, Main Street and downtown redevelopment, utility services and local retail environments. Attendees also heard from economic, tourism and local government subject matter experts.

Our team was thrilled that so many individuals took advantage of these training opportunities – we were at capacity for both sessions. It has been especially encouraging to see numerous young individuals taking on leadership roles in their communities as well as the initiative to learn about the nuances of municipal government. It is our hope that, as we move forward into this new year, each of you will continue to be involved and utilize the many resources we offer to municipalities. The League has an exciting year planned for our municipal officials that will provide you with networking and engagement opportunities, as well as additional training.

You'll notice on the cover and within this issue we highlight the importance of surveys. Surveys are not new to our organization; however, since expanding our advocacy team this summer, we have been intentional about reimagining the impact of our surveys and the benefits they provide – not only for you but our organization as well. Baker Allen, the League's Director of Policy and Research, has written an excellent article that examines the importance of our surveys; why it is critical you take the time to respond;



Greg Cochran with Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth (left) and recently elected Congressman Jerry Carl (middle).

and how we will be using the information. I hope you will not only read his article but take the time to support our efforts around this valuable resource by responding when we reach out to you throughout the year.

Recently, we shared with you the first edition of our *Municipal Resources Guide*. The state of Alabama provides countless resources for local governments across several state agencies. As part of our mission to support our members and their communities, the League created a one stop guide to navigating these resources. The guide provides an overview of valuable resources including program description, matching requirements, contact information and deadlines. Our advocacy team is diligently working on a resource guide that will cover these same resources, but from a federal perspective. Both resource guides will be housed on our website under the "Training & Resources" tab, and we look forward to you and your community utilizing them.

Additionally, we have several trainings and networking opportunities available to you throughout 2021. Our first event, Advocacy Day, is scheduled for February 9th at the Montgomery Performing Arts Center (MPAC) with speakers that include legislative leaders; cabinet and agency heads; and professionals who will train municipal officials in media and grassroots advocacy. The event will conclude with a reception at the MPAC for conference attendees, state policy makers and strategic partners. If you have not yet registered, there is still time to do so. Please visit our website, www.almonline.org, to register. Looking further out, the League's Annual Convention is scheduled for May 12-15 in Huntsville. Our goal is to have a voting delegate from every municipality in our state attend the convention Business Session. Therefore, we are building a conference agenda to entice your attendance and ensure you have valuable take-aways from your engagement. Convention is our most widely attended event and a wonderful opportunity to network with leaders from across the state. Registration

continued on page 31

Leadership Perspective

Mayor Leigh Dollar • Guntersville • ALM President



Now that you have been in office a few months, you may be wondering what in the world you were thinking when you decided to run. Rest assured in knowing that *servicing* your community will be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. No one said it would be easy, just it would be worth it!

Leading during normal times can be tough but leading during a pandemic is very difficult. Decisions can be hard to make because not everyone is happy with the outcome. Oftentimes we must make split-second decisions that are very difficult and can be heart-wrenching – even though we are making the best decisions possible with the most recent information while knowing this information may change tomorrow. Progress comes hard! That being said, our constituents elected us to make decisions in the best interest of our communities. In so doing, we must learn to *listen* to our constituents and understand what is important to them. It may not be the same thing we think is important; however, we must be open-minded to what they are saying. We don't serve to accomplish our personal agendas. We serve to help people. This is my favorite part of the job. If I can help solve one person's issue (no matter how large or small), I have been successful and get satisfaction in knowing I made a difference in someone's life.

Accountability at the local level is much higher than at any other level of government because we are easily recognizable (and can't hide) and the whole community knows what we are doing – *and they are watching*. Therefore, we must hold ourselves to a higher standard and always remember we represent the entire community. Not only do we have to *listen* (we learn more by listening than talking), but we must *empathize* with our constituents. Most of the time people just want to be heard. There will be times we can't solve an issue; however, if we actively *listen* and let them express their concerns, they usually feel so much better. Putting the needs of others first, including constituents and employees, is all part of being a servant leader. It is not always easy but it is so satisfying! Thank you for putting yourself in the spotlight to serve your community. You are appreciated! ■



Mayor Gary Fuller • Opelika • ALM Vice President

In every city and town in Alabama, people make the difference. I believe the most successful communities have leaders who encourage and develop their people. We should all know the definition of “servant leadership.” It's a philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. No question it's different from the traditional leadership model. As you know, a servant leader puts the needs of the employees first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. Robert K. Greenleaf, the person who developed the servant leader concept, encourages us to approach situations and organizations from the perspective of a servant first, looking to lend our presence to answer the needs of the organization and others.

As municipal leaders, we should hold ourselves to a high standard while never losing sight that we were elected to represent *all* of our citizens. We must consider the needs of everyone, which is why the servant leader model is so valuable to locally elected officials. Every day brings challenges; however, every day is also an opportunity for tremendous success.

I recommend to all leaders, regardless of level, that they read *The One Minute Manager*. This little 112 page book written by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson has been around since 1982. It discusses three techniques: one-minute goal setting; one-minute praising; and one-minute reprimands. My personal favorite is the one-minute praising – catch folks doing something right and offer instant praise! It's truly amazing how people respond when you do this.

As we continue to deal with the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we must maintain our focus and provide stable, steady guidance and encouragement to our employees, community stakeholders and citizenry. Local leadership is the foundation for the quality of life in our communities. We are the standard bearers. ■

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Your ALM Team For bios and contact info: almonline.org



We must do everything within our power to ensure Alabama's cities and towns continue to provide essential resources and services that foster safe, vibrant spaces for businesses to thrive and citizens to live, work, play and prosper."

~ Gregory D. Cochran, ALM Executive Director

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continued next page

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Technology



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Technology



Rob Sellers
Information Systems Specialist

"Municipal government is a training ground in democracy and governmental statesmanship. Municipal government is also the level at which the citizen can most directly participate in the democratic process."

~ Ed E. Reid, ALM Executive Director, 1935–1965
Some Facts About Municipal Government in Alabama
Alabama League of Municipalities, 1955



Ken Gabehart
Information Systems Technician/
Facilities Manager

Established on May 15, 1935 as a full-time, voluntary association of Alabama's cities and towns, the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) has continuously served as the primary legislative advocate for Alabama's municipalities, representing its members at the Alabama Legislature, in Congress and with numerous administrative agencies. Since 1935, ALM has worked to strengthen municipal government through advocacy, training and the advancement of effective local leadership. Today, ALM's 450+ member municipalities benefit from a variety of member programs, services and activities designed specifically to meet their needs and enhance the quality of life services that Alabama's citizens not only expect but demand.

Since its inception, ALM has introduced and/or supported legislation that has state-wide impact on municipal government. Legislative priority initiatives are determined and approved by member municipalities at the yearly Legislative Committee meeting before the Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature. In 1994, the League established the Elected Officials Training Program for elected municipal officials. This specialized, voluntary program was the second in the nation and provides elected officials an opportunity to receive year-round continuing education training. Mayors and councilmembers can earn three professional certifications: Certified Municipal Official (CMO, 40 credit hours), Advanced Certified Municipal Official (additional 40 credit hours) and Emeritus (additional 120 credit hours plus 15 points of continuing education). League staff members provide training for municipal officials and municipal staff frequently throughout the year, both at League events and those held by other entities.

As the League approaches its centennial, the leadership has committed to a deeper focus on advocacy as well as additional concerted education and outreach efforts. ALM is continually exploring new programs and expanding its strategic narratives to further position the Alabama League of Municipalities as the expert in and voice for municipal government while expanding its reach to include citizens, thought leaders and strategic partners who can assist the state's cities and towns as Alabama continues to evolve.

Regardless of economic challenges or shifting political dynamics, citizens expect critical services to continue – services derived through municipal policies and programs. Therefore, strong, proactive municipal government will remain paramount. And the Alabama League of Municipalities will continue to promote and protect this form of government closest to the citizens.



League Timeline 1935-2020

1935

Although attempts to organize began as early as 1914, the Alabama League of Municipalities did not find solid footing until a small cadre of mayors met in Montgomery and, with the advice and guidance of **Gov. Bibb Graves**, hired **Ed Reid** as Executive Secretary – which was made possible by a contribution from the American Municipal Association (precursor to the National League of Cities) that went towards Reid’s initial salary.

Laws were passed to authorize municipalities to enact zoning laws and control subdivisions.

1937

Ed Reid published the inaugural issue of *The Alabama Municipal News* – a publication dedicated to providing accurate information, informed opinions and pragmatic advice for running towns and cities.

Municipalities were authorized to license businesses in the exercise of their police power as well as for revenue-raising purposes. *City of Birmingham v. Hood-McPherson Realty Co.*, 172 So. 118



Ed Reid, the League’s first Executive Director, remained at the helm until his death in 1965.

1939

Law was passed to allow municipalities to acquire electric systems operating within the municipal limits.



State Capitol in Montgomery circa 1930s. (Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.)

1942

→ **Municipal Revenue Service** was established to provide necessary investigations to collect unpaid and escaped delinquent insurance license taxes from insurance companies doing business in Alabama’s municipalities. In 2020, the Alabama League of Municipalities mailed more than \$600,000 in refund checks (some in excess of \$20,000) to its participating cities and towns for delinquent insurance license taxes collected on their behalf through this program – which is still going strong after 79 years!

1943

→ Law was passed to authorize the Attorney General to issue opinions to counties and municipalities.

1944

→ *The Alabama Local Government Journal*, formally published as *The Alabama Municipal News*, became the official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities.

1945

→ Constitutional Amendment was passed to allow all municipalities to levy up to 12 1/2 mills of ad valorem taxes

→ Law was enacted to authorize mayors to operate municipal utility systems for additional pay.

1946 — The League signed a lease on a small, seven-room, shot-gun style building located on S. Hull Street in downtown Montgomery. The offices would remain at this location for the next 24 years.

1948 — The League began publishing *The Handbook for Mayors and Councilmembers* every four years.

1949 — Cater Act was passed to create municipal industrial development boards.
 — State Connecting Link roads were designated.

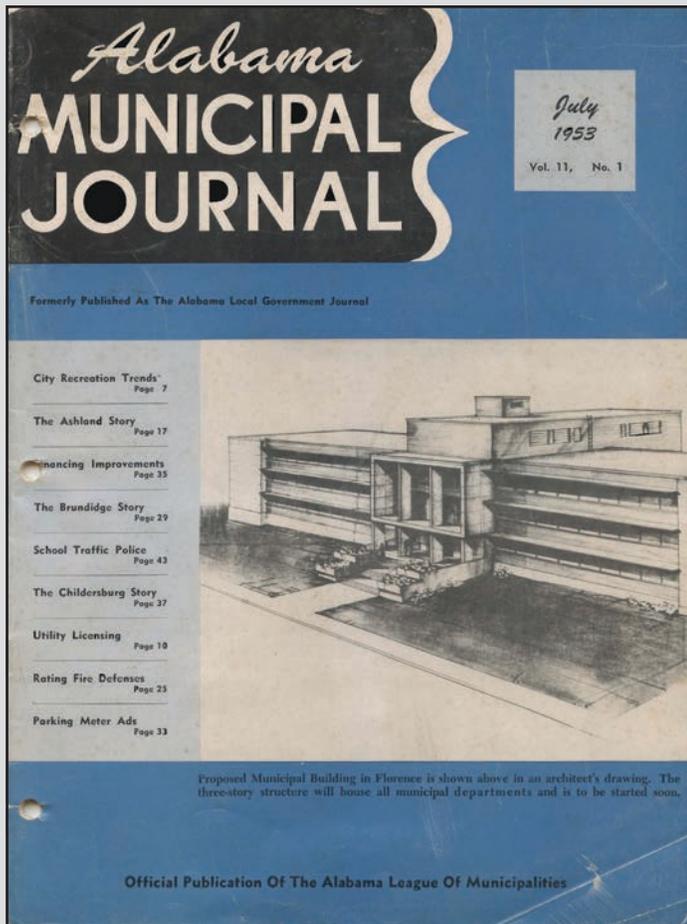
1952 — *Evers v. City of Dadeville*, 61 So.2d 78 — upheld the gross receipts license tax in the nature of a sales tax.

1953 — The *Alabama Municipal Journal*, formerly published as *The Alabama Local Government Journal*, became the official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities. (See image below.)

— Law was passed to authorize county and municipal employees to participate in the State Retirement System.



From the Oct. 1946 *Alabama Local Government Journal*: *THE NEW HEADQUARTERS PLEASES THEM* – Tuscaloosa Commissioner J. Frank Livingston, left, League president (1943-1950), and Ed E. Reid, Executive Secretary, survey the grounds of the League of Municipalities' new home at 14 South Hull Street in Montgomery. They were both pleased at the way the exterior as well as the interior looked. In the spacious five room headquarters, an elaborate library, two offices, storage rooms and a reception room are included. Both county and municipal officials are invited to drop in whenever they're in the Capital City. League headquarters is easily reached being only two blocks from Capital Hill.



1956 — John Watkins was hired as the League's first Staff Attorney. A native of Faunsdale, AL and a 1945 graduate of the University of Alabama School of Law, Watkins practiced law in Prattville for five years followed by serving several years as a judge before joining the League staff.

1958 — *Al Means v. City of Montgomery*, 104 So.2d 816 — Provided judicial authority for city sales taxes.

1961 — First comprehensive municipal election laws enacted.

1965 — The League’s first Executive Director, Ed Reid, died of cancer. Reid, who was hired in 1935, had been the League’s “sparkplug” for 30 years. *The Montgomery Advertiser* succinctly described Reid and the League in a circa 1955 article: *The Alabama League of Municipalities, you might say, is Alabama’s 10th Congressional District and its congressman is its director, Ed E. Reid. As Mohammedans to Mecca, politicians at all levels make pilgrimages to the little red brick office building of the League on a Hull Street incline. There, Reid, short, dapper and given to alternating blasts of amiable mimicry and barking truculence, presides. He is one of the remarkable figures on the Alabama scene. Because of his influence over the mayor-members of his organization and his encyclopedic knowledge of practical politics, all politicians crave his help.*



Ed Reid with his wife, Josephine.

— Staff Attorney **John Watkins** was named the League’s second Executive Director during the 1965 Annual Convention.

1967 — Current 20% Constitutional Debt Limit was established.

1968 — Realizing the Hull Street location was no longer large enough to accommodate its needs, for \$60,000 the League purchased Lots 37 and 38 in the New Philadelphia Subdivision of Montgomery County – on the corner of Adams Avenue and Bainbridge Street, in shouting distance of the Alabama capitol building, to build a new headquarters.



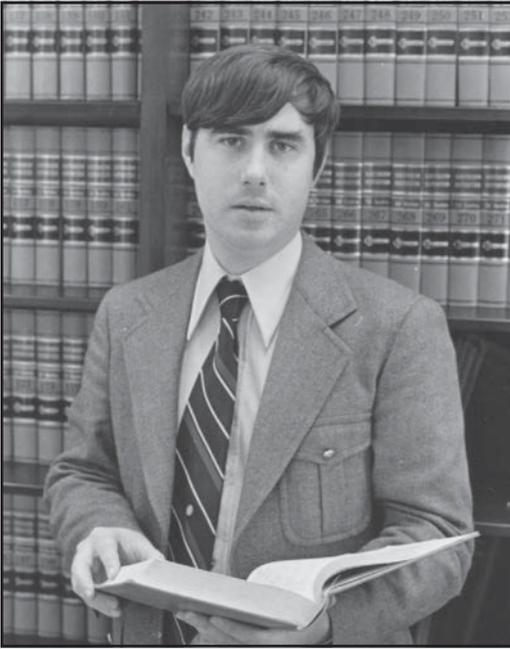
John Watkins became the League’s second Director in 1965 following the death of Ed Reid.

1969 — Authority for “true” sales tax was enacted.



New League Headquarters at 535 Adams Avenue, 1970. The Capitol can be seen at right.

1970 — New League headquarters building at 535 Adams Avenue was dedicated in on Thursday, October 29, 1970 at 3 p.m. Designed by Montgomery architecture firm Tom Kirkland and Associates, the two-story structure was a testament to the aesthetic sensibilities of the time, embracing a more streamlined modernity and bringing added light, air, and space for the growing staff. Thanks to healthy building fund contributions from most of the League’s membership, the structure was nearly paid for by the time of its official dedication.



Perry Roquemore was hired as staff attorney in 1974 and became Executive Director in 1986.

1971 → Unanimous Consent Annexation authority was enacted.
 ↳ Municipal elections became non-partisan.

1972 → The League began publishing the *Selected Readings for Municipal Officials* every four years.

1973 → The League began publishing a weekly *Legislative Bulletin* during each Legislative session. Prior to 1973, legislative updates were published in the League’s newsletter and/or monthly *Journal*.

1974 → Perry C. Roquemore, Jr. was hired as League Staff Attorney. He would later become the League’s third Executive Director following John Watkins’ retirement in 1986.

1975 → *Jackson v. City of Florence*, 320 So.2d 68 – abolished doctrine of governmental immunity.

1976 → The **Municipal Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. (MWCF)** was established to provide workers compensation insurance coverage to municipalities, housing authorities, utility boards and other city agencies. The League created MWCF during a “hard market” when private carriers were not interested in insuring many of Alabama’s municipalities. MWCF is the second oldest League insurance pool in the nation. www.almwcf.org



www.almwcf.org

1977 → The Alabama Legislature placed a cap on municipal tort liability.

1978 → *Peddycoart v. City of Birmingham*, 354 So.2d 808 – Outlawed general bills of local application.

↳ A Constitutional Amendment was adopted to authorize the establishment of eight classes of municipalities based on population.

1981 → **Council President Nina Miglionico (“Miss Nina”) of Birmingham was the first woman elected League President.** The daughter of Italian immigrants, Miss Miglionico was a lifelong Birmingham resident and later became one of the first female lawyers in the state. She was the first woman elected to Birmingham’s city government, serving on the City Council for 22 years from 1963 until 1985. From 1978 until 1981, she served as Council President – the first female to hold that title. A graduate of Howard (now Samford) University, Miss Miglionico earned her law degree from the Alabama School of Law in 1936 and is thought to be the first woman in Alabama to have established her own firm. With 73 years of service, she held the unique distinction of being the longest practicing female attorney in the history of the State of Alabama. She died at age 95 in May 2009.



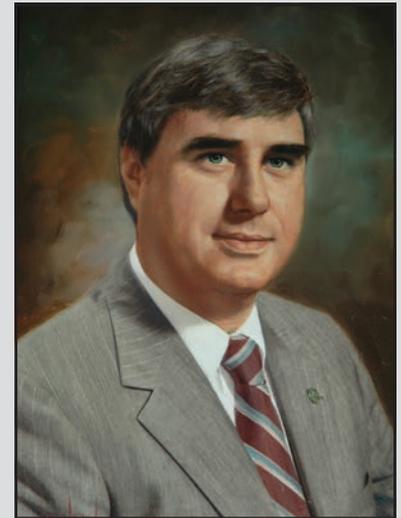
Birmingham Council President Nina Miglionico became the League’s first female president in 1981.

1985 → The League celebrated its **50th Anniversary** during the Annual Convention in Montgomery.

1986 → **Perry Roquemore became the League's third Executive Director** following the retirement of John Watkins.

→ *Dillard v. Crenshaw County*, 640 F. Supp. 1347 Required most governments in Alabama to elect members of their governing bodies from districts rather than at-large.

→ Legislation was enacted to authorize municipalities to receive a share of the oil and gas trust fund interest.



Perry Roquemore became Executive Director in 1986. He retired in 2011.



Outgoing League President, Mayor Steve Means of Gadsden (left), and incoming President, Mayor Harold Swearingen of Pine Hill (right), light the 50th Anniversary candle during the 1985 Annual Convention.

1987 → Law was enacted to create revolving loan program for wastewater treatment.

1988 → A Constitutional Amendment was approved to limit state-enacted unfunded mandates.



Mayor Johnny Ford of Tuskegee became the League's first African American President in 1989.

1989 → **Mayor Johnny Ford of Tuskegee became the first African-American League President.** Elected as Mayor in 1972, Ford was one of the first black mayors, along with A.J. Cooper of Prichard, elected to a city of more than 10,000 people in modern-era Alabama. In 1998 he was elected State Representative of the 82nd District from Macon County as a Democrat. He served from 1999 until 2004. In February 2003, he switched parties and became Alabama's first black Republican legislator in more than 100 years. He served as Tuskegee mayor again from 2004 until 2008 and from 2012 until 2016 and now serves on the city council.

→ The **Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC)** was established as a mutual insurance company organized under the laws of the State of Alabama and owned by its member municipalities. The League created AMIC during a "hard" insurance market when many municipalities could not get insurance or were charged exorbitant prices. AMIC continues to write all lines of insurance and celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2014. www.amicentral.org



www.amicentral.org

1990—The Alabama Legislature authorized the State Employees Insurance Board to establish a health insurance plan for municipalities.

1992—The **Alabama Association of Municipal Attorneys (AAMA)** was created to serve and benefit municipal attorneys and prosecutors throughout the State of Alabama by fostering communication and education of attorneys and the public as to the unique aspects of municipal law.



Rep. Bill Dukes, former Mayor of Decatur and past League President (1987-88), addressed CMO graduates at every graduation ceremony from 1994 until 2010. This photo is from the 2009 ceremony. Dukes passed away in December 2014 at age 87. He served as mayor for 18 years followed by 16 years in the Alabama Legislature.

1994—Tort liability of municipal officers and employees was capped.

—ALM becomes the second League in the nation to offer a **Certified Municipal Official (CMO) Program**, which was established as a series of continuing education programs for mayors and councilmembers who voluntarily wish to receive training in municipal government. Officials earning 40 hours of credit receive their CMO designation.

1995—The League expanded its headquarters building, creating a basement and much needed additional office space.

1997—*City of Prattville v. Joyner*, 698 So. 2d 122 – Held that a municipality is not required to continue providing services in its police jurisdiction when it stops collecting taxes in the area.

1998—The League launches its website: www.alalm.org.

—Joint powers authority was enacted.

—The League established the **Advanced Certified Municipal Official** designation for those elected officials who receive an additional 40 hours of training after completing their initial CMO designation.

1999—A Constitutional Amendment was approved to protect the municipal share of oil and gas trust fund revenues.

2000—AMIC purchased the building at 110 North Ripley Street in downtown Montgomery and moved all services in-house. In 2021, AMIC continues to expand its coverage, including free cyber liability coverage and other options for its members.

2002—AMIC and MWCF developed an internal League **Loss Control Division** to provide a variety of services, including regional and on-site training programs, proactive driver training (SkidCar), firearms training (FATS), and four loss control representatives assigned to various areas of the state. The Division currently has 10 staff members and an extensive website, www.losscontrol.org, offering free online training to members as well as bulletins, reference documents, newsletters and additional risk management information.



www.amicentral.org

2006 → The **Alabama Municipal Funding Corporation (AMFund)** was established to assist Alabama municipalities with funding local projects and purchases through low-cost financing. www.amfund.com

2007 → **Councilwoman Cynthia McCollum** of Madison became the first Alabama official elected President of the National League of Cities (NLC).

→ The **Alabama Municipal Judges Association (AMJA)** was re-established to serve and benefit municipal judges throughout the State of Alabama by fostering communication and education for municipal judges in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Alabama's municipal courts.



Councilwoman Cynthia McCollum of Madison delivers her acceptance speech in 2007 as the first Alabama official to be elected President of the National League of Cities.

2010 → The League celebrated its **75th Anniversary** during its Annual Convention in Mobile May 15-18. When the League officially organized in 1935, it did so with 24 member cities and towns. In May 2010, that number was 442 out of 460 municipalities in 67 counties. In 2021, the League has 450+ members out of 463 incorporated municipalities.

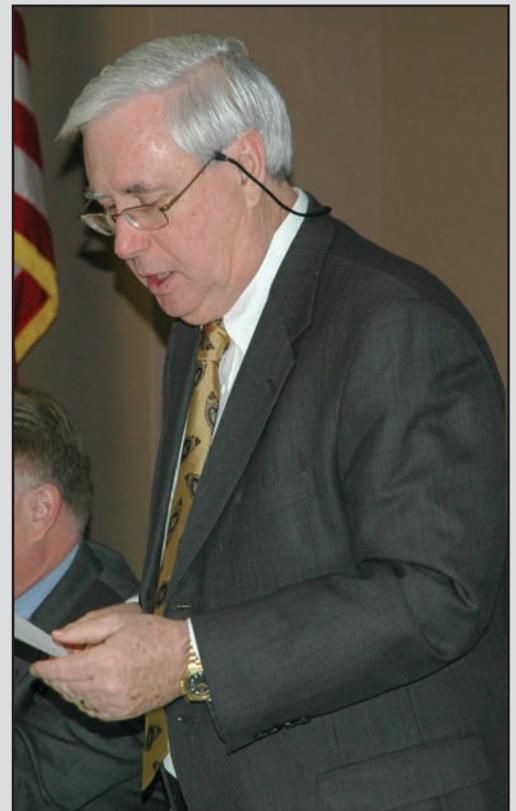
→ Law was passed allowing local governments to purchase goods and services through vendors with a current and valid contract with the Government Services Administration without further competitive bidding.

2011 → **Perry Roquemore retired in May** with 37 years of service – the longest-serving League employee to date.



www.amfund.com

2009 → Pre-zoning Authority was enacted.



Perry Roquemore's last Executive Committee Meeting, January 2011.



Ken Smith became Executive Director in 2011.

2011 League Deputy Director **Ken Smith** became the League’s fourth Executive Director following Perry Roquemore’s retirement. Originally hired in 1986 as League Staff Attorney, Ken also served as General Counsel and Deputy Director before being named Executive Director.

2013 The League established its official Facebook page, www.facebook.com/ALALM. “Like” ALM on Facebook and receive timely information about ALM’s legislative endeavors; League events such as upcoming CMO sessions, policy committee meetings, annual convention and national conferences; and articles of interest for municipal officials and employees.

Passed legislation creating municipal entertainment districts.

Passed legislation allowing municipal pretrial diversion programs.

2014 Law was passed enacting the Debt Setoff Authorization Act.

2015 The League launched **League Law**, an online legal research system allowing subscribers to search selected Alabama and federal cases affecting municipalities, including summaries of Alabama Attorney General’s opinions, Ethics Commission opinions and Alabama and federal court opinions.

The League launched **Municipal Intercept Services (MIS)**, a debt intercept program designed to allow local governments to recover a portion of the outstanding debts they previously deemed lost from an individual’s State tax refund. MIS is Alabama’s *only* state tax refund municipal debt recovery program. www.alintercept.org



www.alintercept.org

Law was passed enacting the Remote Sales Tax Remittance Act.

Law was passed enacting the Alabama Reinvestment and Abatements Act.

The League created a third designation in its Certified Municipal Official Program, **CMO Emeritus**, which recognizes mayors and councilmembers who have excelled beyond the requirements of the Basic and Advanced CMO Programs. CMO Emeritus is awarded to officials who have acquired a minimum of 120 credit hours of Continuing CMO Education plus 15 points. Points can be earned by participating on ALM policy committees and attending specific ALM and NLC events. The first class to earn CMO Emeritus status graduated in December 2015.



2015 ↗ **Councilwoman Sadie Britt** of Lincoln, Alabama – “Ms. Sadie” – became the first African American female president of the Alabama League of Municipalities – only the fourth woman to serve as President since 1935. In the early 1990s, Sadie was approached by the then mayor of Lincoln to fill an open position on the Council. She’s been in office ever since – the first African American woman to serve on the Council, running unopposed all but three times and then winning handily against her opposition. Since being appointed to the Council more than two decades ago, Sadie has been active with the Alabama League of Municipalities. Prior to being elected League Vice President in 2014, Sadie was the Vice Chair of the League’s Committee on State and Federal Legislation for two years and then Chair for two years. She had also previously served as the Vice Chair and then Chair of the Human Development Committee as well as several years on the League’s Executive Committee. She currently serves as president of the Board of Directors for the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. (MWCF), which was established by the League in 1976. In addition, Sadie immediately became involved in the League’s Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program when it was launched in 1996 and was part of the first graduating class to earn Emeritus Status – the highest CMO level – in December 2015.



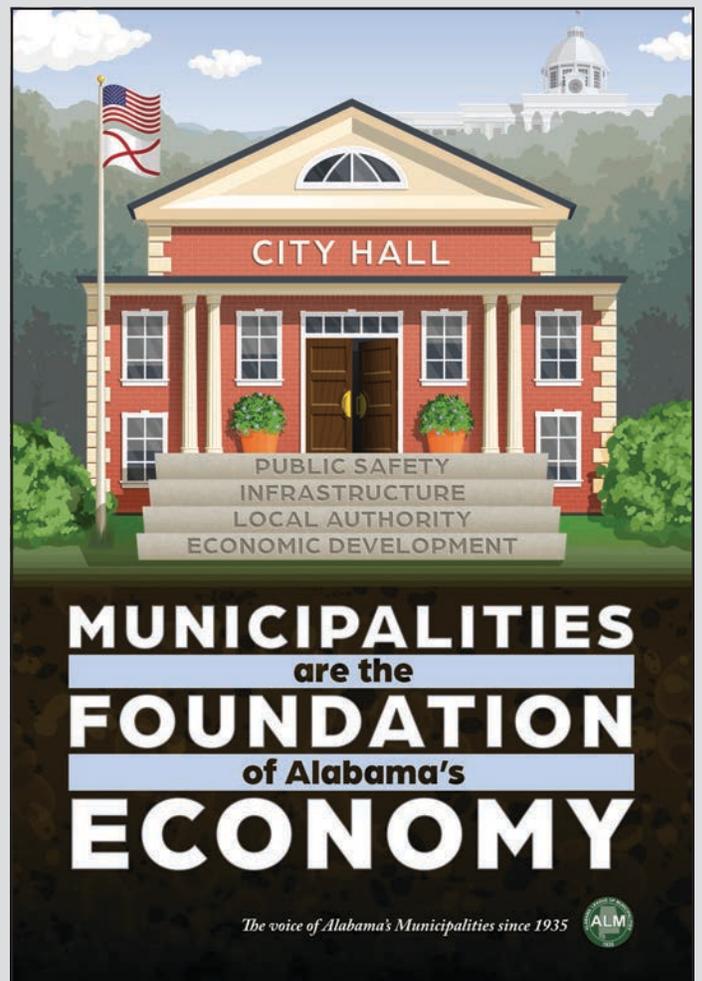
2016 → Law was enacted repealing the Municipal Commission form of government.

2017 → ALM began annual **Advocacy Campaigns** with specific graphics, publications and statewide legislative dinners.

2018 → AMIC endowed historic municipal law school chair at Cumberland School of Law.



Henry Strickland, Dean, Cumberland School of Law (left), with Steve Wells, President, AMIC, as the official paperwork formally establishing the Stephen Everett Wells Chair in Municipal Law was signed.



2019

ALM creates **Alabama First Responders Benefits Program** to provide enhanced cancer and disability coverage to career paid and volunteer firefighters.

Rebuild Alabama infrastructure bill passed to improve Alabama's roads and bridges via an additional 10-cent gas tax split between the state (66.66 percent), counties (25 percent) and cities (8.33 percent).



ALM stood with Gov. Kay Ivey during her March 1, 2019 Rebuild Alabama press conference in Montgomery.



2020

ALM redesigned League and CMO logos and secured a new domain for its website: **www.almonline.org**.

ALM membership adopted a new board and committee structure through first changes to the League's constitution since the early 1980s.

The League worked with federal, state and local officials to overcome the serious challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the creation of a **Revenue Loss Portal** to collect accurate data to more effectively advocate for replacement stimulus funds.

Gregory D. Cochran, a 24-year ALM employee adept in advocacy and governmental relations, was named the League's fifth Executive Director following the retirement of Ken Smith.



2021+

As the League approaches its centennial, the leadership has committed to a deeper focus on advocacy as well as additional concerted education and outreach efforts. ALM is continually exploring new programs and expanding its strategic narratives to further position the Alabama League of Municipalities as the expert in and voice for municipal government while expanding its reach to include citizens, thought leaders and strategic partners who can assist the state's cities and towns as Alabama continues to evolve.



Greg Cochran named 5th Executive Director

The League Welcomes New Team Member Debra Pascal

Debra is a lifelong resident of Montgomery, Alabama, and has always been fascinated with its history. She attended Huntingdon College, receiving her BA in Elementary Education. While working at Alfa Insurance as a Homeowner Underwriter, Debra also received her Certificate in General Insurance. She spent 10 years at Alfa before becoming a stay-at-home mom for the next seven years. After being heavily involved in the Dalraida Elementary PTA, Debra was hired to work at the school where she served as inventory clerk, textbook coordinator, secretary and technology coordinator for 10 years.

From 2016 until 2020, Debra was Assistant to the Director at the Alabama Bicentennial Commission. In this role, she helped coordinate celebrations and commemorations that focused on Alabama's 200th birthday. During her time with the Commission, she was fortunate to learn something new about the state nearly every day as well as interact with many elected officials, professionals, educators and volunteers from throughout Alabama.



Debra joined the League in December 2020 and provides administrative support to the Advocacy Team; assists with meeting planning; and coordinates a variety of programs and activities. She and her husband Mike are parents to daughters Mandy and Haley, both living and working in the Birmingham area. Mike and Debra attend Eastern Hills Baptist Church where she is active in the adult choir and ensemble. ■

Your internet service provider may be blocking emails from the League

By Chuck Stephenson • Director of Information Technology • ALM

As many of you know, ALM recently changed our website and email addresses from alalm.org to almonline.org. As a result of this change, a handful of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been treating emails from the League's new domain as SPAM and blocking them. Our IT Team has worked with Microsoft and determined that this is occurring because the individual ISPs, out of an abundance of caution, are blocking League emails. Regrettably, this is not something the League can fix for you. There are numerous reasons the ISPs are doing this, and most of them are done because of algorithms that neither you nor the League have any control over. Keep in mind, they do this to protect you and your data. Unfortunately, sometimes their efforts filter out legitimate emails – as we are finding is the case with League emails by several service providers. Fortunately, there is something *you* can do to ensure you receive League emails.

Whitelist the League's Domain with Your Service Provider

You will need to contact your service provider directly. Be aware, however, that if you ask your ISP to fix this issue for you, their response will likely be: "We don't actively block any emails." (Which means you probably won't receive much help resolving the issue.) Therefore, you will need to be more specific with your request. Ask them to help you log into the portal website and "whitelist" the League's domain, almonline.org, which should resolve your issue. Please note that the portal website is the site where you most likely pay your bill and is *not* Outlook or the app on your phone where you receive your email. ■



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The Splendid Survey

ALM Uses Data Driven Approach to Advocate for Municipalities

Baker Allen ♦ Director of Policy and Research ♦ ALM

In large part, the Alabama League of Municipalities' success as an association and an advocate for cities and towns stems from two-way communication with its members. Through eblasts, conferences and this quarterly *Journal*, we relay important activities and opportunities occurring at the state and federal levels of government. At the same time, the League receives important information from municipalities. Through meetings with our board and executive committee; regional meetings with state policy makers; and regular calls with strategic and community partners, we are able to gather valuable grassroots insight on the challenges that municipalities face. Now, the League has an opportunity to further improve how your voice is heard. Through targeted and topic specific surveys, the League takes a data driven approach to identifying the needs of your community.

Surveys are not a new tool for the League. In fact, you may recall receiving an email from us asking about your experience with our Certified Municipal Officials (CMO) program or the condition of your wastewater system. When well-crafted and implemented, surveys enhance vital two-way communication all associations strive for.

Surveys Capture Timely Information and Specific Data

At its heart, a survey is a method of gathering information. To gather different types of information requires different types of surveys. The League's current survey platform, Qualtrics, allows us to structure surveys in a variety of ways as well as target those surveys to the municipal official or employee best suited to respond. By targeting the specific individuals – mayors, councilmembers, clerks, etc. – we save you time and energy. Qualtrics is a sophisticated, cloud-based survey platform the League has used for many years. Until recently, however, we did not fully integrate Qualtrics as a part of our advocacy strategy. A sophisticated survey platform provides a variety of customizable features.

Adding questions that capture binary responses (yes or no), sliding scale (very likely to very unlikely), dropdown (choosing from a list), multiple choice (specific reasons) and descriptive text (user direct input) offers a clearer picture of the reality for municipalities.

Customizing our surveys enables the League to collect the most relevant information about a subject. Importantly, when you receive a survey, it will come from someone at the League with a description in the email about the subject, how long it should take to complete the survey and a link to the survey. After opening the email, click on the link to begin the survey. If you ever have a question, the email contains contact information for the person at the League responsible for the survey.

Normally, you will receive a survey from the League about once a month that will generally contain five or less questions. Through these short surveys, we seek to capture specific data on a subject. The surveys you receive can be categorized as either informational or perspective. An “informational” survey seeks to collect specific facts, such as employment figures. The responses to this type of survey can be shared to highlight activity occurring at the local level or defend against policies that hinder a city or town from providing the quality of life services its citizens expect. The “perspective” survey captures *your* voice and seeks to identify priorities in your community. With your feedback, we receive the guidance to develop policies that best fit your needs. *Your* survey responses allow us to provide direct value to you, whether its communicating to policy makers the impact something may have on municipalities or providing the League with the evidence to expand existing services or develop new ones.

Surveys Help Determine Services

Most recently, when the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) wanted to know how many

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municipalities were likely to participate in a potential new service, the Municipal Debris Removal Program designed to provide participating municipalities assistance with debris removal costs following a natural disaster, the League developed a short survey to determine if this program could be viable. On September 1, 2020, the League sent out a five-question survey to mayors and clerks to gauge their interest. By the close of the survey on September 30, more than 250 municipalities had responded with 150 interested in participating. The data collected from this survey provided AMIC with the evidence they needed move forward with an invitation to every Alabama municipality to participate. This is one shining example of how your participation in surveys provides the evidence to transform great ideas into reality.

Additional surveys on a variety of topics have been sent over the past few months. The 2020 Orientation and Municipal Leadership Institute (MLI) Satisfaction Survey provided important feedback about the quality of our conference and will allow us to determine where we need to make improvements for the upcoming Annual Convention in Huntsville on May 12-15, 2021. Thanks to our “Comprehensive Election Results Survey” and “Municipal Contact Information Survey”, the League now has accurate contact information for our members following the recent municipal elections cycle. The 345 responding municipalities provided great insight on municipal elections in Alabama. Of those municipalities, 246 – 71 percent – held elections with 41 percent of their officials newly elected to their position. As an advocacy and educational organization, the League uses this information to develop its programs. With such a high turnover rate each election cycle, the League’s efforts to prepare officials is even more important. In addition to election data, our survey collected contact information for all municipal officials. The League relies on accurate contact information to keep our membership up to date on the activities of the legislature, new programs, surveys and what is relevant (or not) to the function of municipal government.

Your Participation is Critical

Your League team is diligent about developing surveys that: 1) respect your time and 2) only request necessary information. Your participation greatly expands our ability to collect accurate information and communicate that information with policy makers. Our two-way communication rests on the pillar of surveys. So, please keep an eye out for surveys from the League and help us help you. Of course, should you have any questions regarding our surveys or our process, please contact me at ballen@almonline.org. ■

INFORMATION ARMS RACE

DATA! DATA! DATA!

As we have steadily moved into the 21st Century, the demand for data has shifted the world of policymaking, setting off an information arms race, with those unable to produce left out. Lawmakers expect specific and accurate facts and figures before entertaining any policy changes. While providing this information adds an extra level of detail and collaboration, without it, our elected and appointed officials are throwing policy darts in the dark. With reliable information, we can produce better policies that meet the needs of those we aim to help.

Navigating this legislative framework provides the Alabama League of Municipalities an incredible opportunity to take the lead. As the foundation of Alabama’s economy, municipalities are poised to provide specific data from the local level. So, how do we take information from your municipality and convert it into an advocacy strategy? SURVEYS!

To collect information quickly and accurately, we develop short, precise surveys that capture information in real time. We know our members are busy serving their communities, but when you take five minutes to complete our surveys, it adds another important element to the municipal picture. Never underestimate the power of *your* input. *Your* participation is the fuel that allows us to advocate on your behalf. So please keep an eye out and take the time to complete these surveys when they hit your email inbox.

When I joined the League in June, Greg and I discussed the importance and opportunities that data provides for our municipalities. Providing policymakers with a data driven municipal perspective has the power to improve the quality of life for the citizens living in our cities and towns. As Director of Policy and Research, I plan to make sure we take the lead in the new age of the information arms race. Thank you for helping us help you!

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**Marie Turner, City of Pinson,
 Named 2020 Clerk of the Year!**



Congratulations to Marie Turner, City of Pinson, who was named 2020 Municipal Clerk of the Year at the Clerks Conference in Huntsville on December 3, 2020. Marie has been City Clerk since April 2006 and her entire length of service has been with Pinson.



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By Lori Lein, ALM General Counsel

Internal Disputes and the Disruption of Municipal Government

Welcome to a new year and your first full year of a new term of office. If you are new to municipal government, your head may still be swimming trying to take in all there is to know about your new role. The League Legal Department is here to assist you and we have resources available to help you navigate the maze of the legalities of municipal government operations. *The Selected Readings for the Municipal Official* (2020 ed.) provides a comprehensive look at municipal government operations and includes everything from conflicts of interest, taxation, procurement laws and police departments to zoning, spending public money and working with municipal boards. *The Handbook for Mayors and Councilmembers* (2020 ed.) is a more concise guide to the various issues that may present themselves to mayors and councilmembers as they provide leadership to their municipalities. This article, however, is directed towards discussing one of the biggest problems facing some municipalities: internal disputes.

We often receive calls for “legal assistance” where the caller is actually seeking resolution to an internal disagreement wrapped up in a legal question. In many cases, the law is subject to multiple interpretations, especially where the responsibilities and duties between the mayor (as chief executive) and the council (as the legislative body) are concerned. Therefore, these calls are awkward, and we cannot provide an answer about who is right and who is wrong. These disputes are best resolved through compromise and cooperation rather than through legal guidance and so I’ve found that I’ve gotten much more comfortable ending my legal analysis with “but remember, just because you legally can, doesn’t necessarily mean you should. Is that in the best interests of your municipality?”.

The mayor and each councilmember must be able to trust each other and know that actions and words will be respected by other members. Gaining that trust may take time but losing it only takes an instant. Of course, reasonable people will often differ as to the best way to serve their communities and what goals they have for their community. Are you trying to increase population? Build infrastructure? Attract new business? All of these (and many, many more) are legitimate reasons for serving as mayor or on a municipal council. But despite differences of opinion, each of you should respect the views

of others, even if they differ. For example, one councilmember may think that enacting a new zoning ordinance is vital to encourage proper growth of the municipality while another opposes the ordinance on the grounds that it interferes with individual use of property. This difference of opinion does not mean that they are not working toward the same goal. They just have a difference of opinion as to how to obtain that goal.

Ultimately, the functional administration of municipal government comes down to the three things: (1) understanding your lane, (2) managing your expectations and (3) honest and transparent communication.

Stay in Your Lane

It is vital that every mayor and councilmember study and understand the responsibilities assigned to them in their role. Part of that includes learning and appreciating the policies and practices that the city or town has followed in the past. Each municipal office is vested with the necessary authority to accomplish what is needed on behalf of the community and for that individual to serve the interests of the citizens he or she was elected to represent. Alabama law establishes a system that is based on the separation and balance of powers: each elected position acts as both a source of power and a check on the power of others. Problems occur when either feels the need to take on the functions of the other.

In some cases, laws define your role. The mayor is the chief executive of the city or town whereas individual councilmembers are part of the legislative body. Sometimes the law is clear about who performs certain functions, and these are discussed in detail in the *The Selected Readings for the Municipal Official* and *The Handbook for Mayors and Councilmembers*. At other times, the law is silent, leaving it to local officials to determine how best to proceed.

In those circumstances, if you don’t have discussions about your roles and expectations, you’re going to have confusion and conflict. The laws aren’t always clear about who performs each function. What actions are executive? What actions are legislative? You need to have discussions aimed at clearly understanding and agreeing on the responsibilities of the mayor and council, and maybe more importantly, on understanding the limits of those roles.

Keep in mind that confusion over roles is much easier to

resolve *prior* to acting. Once you've stepped on someone else's official toes, they will be much more resistant to working with you to resolve any difficulties. If you wonder whether you have the authority to take some action, check the League's publications, contact your attorney or call the League's Legal Department for advice. Discuss problems openly with other officials, not in an insulting manner, of course, but in a way that seeks only a proper and legal understanding of your role as either mayor or councilmember. The key is to *proactively* ask questions and seek the advice of others and to be willing to stand down and accept the answer even if it is one you don't want to hear.

Manage your expectations

Learning the art of compromise will serve you well in your role as an elected official but where do you start? Start by managing your own expectations. Understanding your expectations requires honesty and the willingness to look beyond what you think is the ultimate goal. The key to conflict resolution is compromise: you expect A and another official expects Z. Both parties must understand that their expectation cannot be A or Z but must lie somewhere in between.

When thinking about your expectations, it is important to define and understand your own position and interests and work to understand those on the other side. You should be able to articulate what your interests are and why they are important to you. Ideally, your interests should be tied to the interests of the people you were elected to serve. What do you want or need from the outcome and what are your concerns, hopes and fears if that outcome isn't met?

But that's only the first step. Often this will get you to A but it won't get you any closer to Z – the “other side's” position. It is vital that you ask yourself the same questions from the vantage point of the other side. What is their interest and why is it important to them? What do they need from the outcome and what are their concerns, hopes and fears?

Interests play an important role in better understanding and managing expectations. Often, people get stuck and waste time and resources haggling over *positions* and the *bottom line*. Interests can be accomplished in many ways whereas a bottom line draws the proverbial “line in the sand” which makes it difficult to find a way to compromise. Working to understand the interests of all sides is the most effective way to manage expectations for all involved and, often, both sides find that their interests aren't so far apart.

Transparent Communication

In the case of municipal government, the law mandates transparency through the Open Meetings Act and Public Records. Literally, being transparent means being easily seen through. In the context of communication, it is simple: No secrets. It is communicating openly and honestly. You can't have effective communication without transparency.

Communication is a two-way street. Before we discuss how to navigate that street, let's deal with the question of what if the other side simply refuses to even come to the table and participate? Sound extreme? It's not. Following every election cycle, the League has numerous municipalities where certain officials simply refuse to participate and government functions are halted. Some officials have gone so far as to drive through the parking lot on meeting night and if a certain official's car is there, they simply drive past and head home. Often this results in a lack of a quorum thus bringing city business to a standstill. In this type of situation, we encourage you to see if there are others who can help you get them to the table. Perhaps there are constituents and others in the community who can encourage participation and compromise. Most citizens want to see their local representatives working together and not stifling government.

Helpful Points to Facilitate More Effective Communication

1. Accept different opinions and don't take them personally. People sometimes have difficulty recognizing that others have views that differ from their own. Once they adopt a position and passionately support it, any opposition can seem personal to them. After all, if your position or suggestion is correct, the only reason someone could differ must be personal, right?

Wrong. Each of you bring our own experiences, opinions and, yes, preconceived notions, to any discussion. Persons disagreeing with you may be basing their opinions on incorrect assumptions or information. In that case, logical questioning may correct those misconceptions. On the other hand, your opinion may be faulty. Be open and examine the opposing view to see if it has merit. You may change your mind or a discussion over the difference of opinion may lead you to a compromise that is better than either side started with. This is where managing your expectations comes into play. Focus on the common interests, starting with serving the public you represent.

2. Don't make your decision *personal*. To have an effective and fully functioning municipal government, it is vital that personal issues remain separate from municipal business. Mayors and councilmembers rarely serve without some outside contact with other members. There may be some pre-existing relationship between you and other officials outside of city hall or before you were elected to office. Additionally, while serving, you will have frequent contact with each other outside meetings. You may work together, go to church together or volunteer at the same facilities. Sometimes, this contact can be classified as less than positive. Perhaps you were on opposing sides in a lawsuit or you compete in business. But whether it is negative or positive, these outside matters must not be allowed to intrude into a council meeting. Decisions should be made on their facts, not because one member either likes or dislikes another.

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY PRIDE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM ALABAMA'S BICENTENNIAL

By Jay Lamar, Executive Director, Alabama Bicentennial Commission (2014-2020)

From tiny to towering, every Alabama community has a story to tell and something unique to offer regarding how community engagement, collaboration and community pride can be synergized to share unique stories, honor people and explore the many wonderful places that make Alabama special.

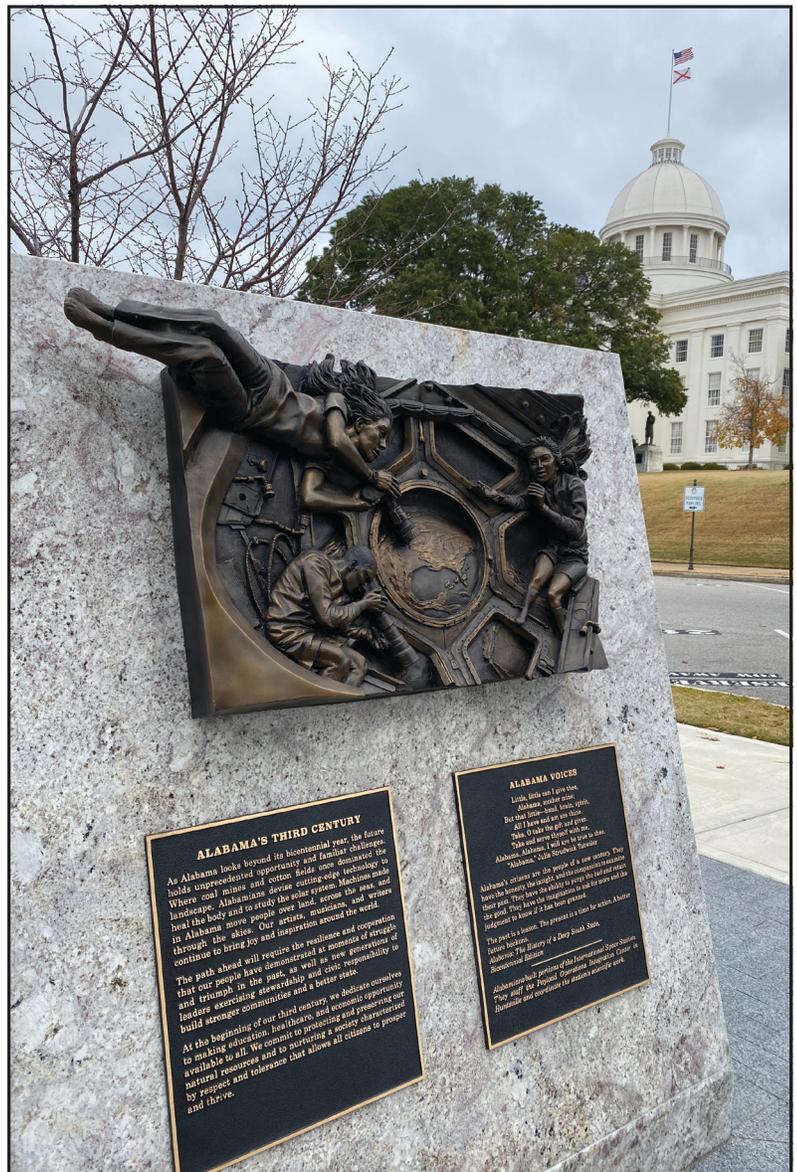
~ Carrie Banks, Alabama 200 Advisory Committee and Communications Director, Alabama League of Municipalities

As readers of the *Journal* know, Alabama wrapped up an unprecedented bicentennial celebration in December 2019. Initiated and guided by Sen. Arthur Orr of Decatur, chair of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission, the 2017-2019 commemoration was preceded by more than four years of planning. Now, a year after the final celebration, we look back on the investment of time and effort to ask not only what we carry forward into the next hundred years but also what we learned along the way.

Among the accomplishments that will carry forward are legacy projects intended to serve the entire state. Alabama Bicentennial Park, located at the foot of the Capitol (www.al200park.alabama.gov) in Montgomery, and “The Future Emerges from the Past: 200 Years of Alabama African American History and Culture” (www.alafricanamerican.com), a bicentennial publication, are two outstanding examples. They both share our history through the stories of people, their families and their communities, helping us know our past and be inspired for the future. Another legacy project, the restoration of Alabama Constitution Hall Park in Huntsville, will continue to tell the story of state’s beginnings through its buildings, grounds and interpreters for countless visitors.

Bicentennial educational initiatives will also serve the future. They included professional development for teachers and the development of significant classroom resources, including lesson plans, maps, publications and primary source packets. More than 1,000 teachers and administrators

participated in workshops, and thousands of students participated in special projects linking their school and their community. What they learned and the bicentennial resources they received are important leave-behinds. Along with the statewide initiatives, they will serve generations to come.



Alabama Bicentennial Park was dedicated on December 14, 2019 and commemorates Alabama’s 200th anniversary of statehood. Located across from the capitol, the park’s bronze relief sculptures present 16 moments from Alabama history, complemented by narratives that provide historical context.

Alabama Communities Made an Impact

Some of the most significant bicentennial accomplishments happened right where you are: in the towns and cities and counties of our state. The local activities initiative, led by Tami Reist of Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association, and the League's Carrie Banks, made good on the commission's commitment that the commemoration would be not just a celebration in Montgomery but a true statewide effort. Over the course of the three-year commemoration, every one of our 67 counties formed committees, developed projects, and hosted celebrations. More than 200 communities also formed official bicentennial committees, and many more participated by incorporating bicentennial themes and programs in their regular activities.

After investing such significant time, effort and resources into the commemoration, it is fair to ask what the bicentennial meant for communities and what was gained by participating. We asked several bicentennial partners for their assessment.

For former Level Plains councilmember and city bicentennial committee chair James Bullinger, it was a lot about community pride. "A lot of times a community can get a bad rap. For years, Level Plains was always the butt of jokes as a speed trap. There was even a radio character from Level Plains, Bronco Brown, whose accent and misadventures poked fun at the town. Let's just say we never had good morale."

But then-mayor Bruce Grantham recognized the opportunity the bicentennial offered. "This is your state and why wouldn't you want to be on the team was our attitude, and Bruce saw the value in this," notes Bullinger. "First, we celebrated our 45th anniversary, then our 50th in 2015, and then four years later the bicentennial. Of course, we got a bicentennial grant, which helped, but we also got good press coverage."

A former public affairs officer at Fort Rucker, Bullinger used the city's projects to develop press releases and other media that highlighted Level Plains and shared its story. The bicentennial projects made good press that, Bullinger says, "helped bring the community together and cast it in a positive light." Receiving one of only 61 Alabama Bicentennial Legacy Project Commendations for its time capsule project provided more good press in 2020. Plus, Bullinger is happy to say, the city already has one event planned for the state's tricentennial: opening its award-winning time capsule.

The city of Tuscaloosa celebrated its bicentennial on December 13, 2019, just one day before the state's anniversary. It planned a full 12-month calendar of events for 2019, including educational programs for students and teachers and the Tuscaloosa Bicentennial Bash concert, which featured the Blind Boys of Alabama and Jason Isbell, among others. The city also commissioned a statue of Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom. Thirty feet tall and weighing approximately 9,500 pounds, the bronze work was installed

at the Park at Manderson Landing and dedicated to the city's past, present and future.

Don Staley, president and CEO of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports, served on the committee and worked closely with the city to see the projects through to completion. To him, the impact of these events and projects "will live on for many years." But he also notes that success for the ambitious schedule and big initiatives was based on people working together. That included committee members, city officials, University of Alabama faculty and staff, local historians, and educators. Besides the projects themselves, what will also live on are "the relationships created from committees, government officials, sponsors and vendors," he adds.

A busy bicentennial schedule was also the case for Marshall County. Katy Norton, president of the Marshall County Convention and Visitors Bureau, describes the first-year bicentennial project as a "paint out."

"Artists had a day to go out into the community and paint 15 of our historic places onsite," she says. "Then we gathered the artwork and developed a traveling exhibit that was displayed throughout the year across our county."

In the second year, a bicentennial county grant helped support making historic panels that told the history of each city in the county. The set of six panels included an introduction to the county, one specific to TVA and the creation of Lake Guntersville, and four relating to the county's cities. According to Norton, "the process of digging into the past has led to our ability to better construct and share our unique stories and to then pass these special qualities and interesting facts about our destination to the visitor in a variety of ways. We had a great time working on the projects and will continue to use the knowledge we gained through both projects in our destination marketing."

Norton adds that the art project "opened our eyes to pieces of our county's heritage that were unknown to us and led to new and interesting stories and relationships ... The project connected us with artists across our state, as well as our local museum. That relationship has flourished and together we continue to plan projects that will be beneficial to our local community and our visitors." The exhibit, printed on pop-up banners, is still loaned out as a traveling exhibit to libraries and schools.

One Marshall County city received special acclaim. For its award-winning Historic Guntersville City Cemetery Celebration, Mayor Leigh Dollar worked closely with the Guntersville City Cemetery Board, the Guntersville Historical Society, Whole Backstage Theatre, Heroes of King's Mountain Chapter of the D. A. R. and local schools. Not only did everyone get along, she says, but "each group made valuable contributions in their areas of expertise and were willing to provide any additional assistance that was needed. We had incredible support from community members

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Municipal Officials Must Learn New Rules of Social Media Interaction

By Kate Coil, *Tennessee Town & City*

Reprinted with permission from the *Tennessee Municipal League*

With its use becoming ubiquitous, more and more municipalities and municipal officials are using social media to reach out to citizens, announce upcoming events and meetings, assist in criminal investigations, alert users to emergency situations, and even livestream council meetings.

However, the benefits of social media also come with a cost with many government entities and officials finding themselves in trouble for their use of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and others.

Elisha Hodge, a legal consultant with UT-MTAS, said many government officials are not aware that social media postings and even emails can be subject to public records laws and actions such as blocking users or deleting posts can be seen as violations of open records acts and even the First Amendment.

“It doesn’t matter what level the employee when it comes to matters of public record,” she said. “If the content included on a social media site or the social media site itself was made in connection with the transaction of government business, the content is public record.”

The internet really began to emerge as a political force during the 2005 presidential campaigns. By 2008, many politicians had discovered platforms like YouTube allowed them to public campaign materials for free rather than paying for spots on TV. A wide variety of social media platforms had come into play by 2012 with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and mobile apps being used by elected officials, city administrators, police and fire departments, and other government agencies to keep in contact with the public.

In her book *New Media and Political Campaigns*, author Diana Owen reported that the internet not only allows constituents and politicians to engage in new ways but also is taking a larger share of the voting audience – particularly younger voters. While most voters still get the bulk of their information from television (67 percent in the 2012 presidential election and 45 percent in the 2014 midterms) the number of voters who turn to the web for information on elections is on the increase (47 percent in the 2012 presidential election and 37 percent in the 2014 midterms).

Of course, the advantages of online citizen engagement come with consequences. In addition to security threats and the occasional online scandal, social media can be murky waters for officials – both elected and non-elected – to navigate, especially when it comes to interacting with the public.

While some officials have argued they have a right to post whatever they want on “personal accounts,” the line gets blurry

when officials use these accounts to disseminate government information or state political opinions on issues.

“There aren’t any bright line rules for when an account set up and being used by a municipal official is a personal account versus a government account being used for official business,” Hodge said. “This is especially true when the information disseminated is primarily government-related business. Officials need to be mindful that with these types of accounts, blocking someone or deleting posts and comments could be a First Amendment violation.”

The rules are clearer when the account was set up by the municipality itself or to conduct city business.

“When an account is set up by a municipal employee or official at the request of the municipality or a department head and the account is used solely to disseminate city or town business – there is case law that sets out the parameters for blocking other users and deleting posts and comments on these types of accounts,” Hodge said. “The rules related to blocking users and deleting comments and posts are much more concrete when the account is a municipal account and that the sole purpose of that account is interaction with the public.”

Many municipalities have begun setting out social media policies for employees to follow while legal debates have ensued over whether or not social media profiles belonging to government entities, municipal employees, or elected officials have the right to delete comments or block interactions with other users.

Judges have continually ruled that elected officials cannot block followers on Twitter citing access to information on elected officials as a constitutional right. Suits have been filed by constituents who were blocked by officials including a former mayor of San Mateo, Calif., a county official from Virginia, a member of the Minneapolis City Council, a Washington state senator, and perhaps most famously President Donald Trump.

According to the courts, the First Amendment protects not only the right to free speech on social media but also the right for social media to be used to petition officials to redress grievances.

“A lot of the recent court cases on this issue relate to users being blocked by governmental entities or officials for being critical of something a government department, official, or employee has done,” Hodge said. “Removing a user’s comment or post because the person is criticizing some government action is not advisable. The courts frown upon that, and more often than

not, hold that conduct constitutes a First Amendment violation. Even if a user is critical of everything that a department or governing body is doing, and there is no other issue with the post or comment aside from the critical content, the post or comment should not be removed or deleted. Other content such as obscenities and language that is discriminatory is less problematic to take off or remove.”

However, social media platforms are developing ways for users to still allow others to see their content without having any interaction with them personally. Twitter allows users to “mute” and “unfollow” other users, which prevents the first user from seeing anything the second user posts but still allows the second user access to the first users’ posts.

Judges have ruled that officials may use technology to mute or unfollow online harassers or “trolls,” but those individuals must still be able to access statements politicians put on social media.

Deleting comments posted by citizens on social media can also have legal consequences. As a general rule, Hodge said comments should only be deleted if they are abusive, threatening, sexually explicit, obscene, discriminatory, or that contain commercial advertising or links to third party sites.

“Before any user’s comment or post is removed or deleted, the city attorney should be contacted,” Hodge said. “The city attorney can review the post or comment, the applicable case law, and then advise the official or employee on how to proceed. The cases on these issues are very fact specific so the city attorney definitely needs to be involved before any content is removed.”

While many government websites and social media accounts set out disclaimers warning that they reserve the right to delete or remove comments, not all of these policies will hold up in court.

“A lot depends on what a municipality’s disclaimer says, what the municipality’s social media policy says, and how they are applied,” Hodge said. “It is important to not only have a disclaimer, but to also have a tab on the page that takes users directly to the municipality’s social media policy. Both the disclaimer and the policy should be reviewed and approved by the city attorney before anyone is allowed to comment or post on the municipality’s social media account. A municipality’s expectations of those posting or commenting on the social media account and the consequences for not meeting those expectations should be clearly enumerated so that no one has a question about what will and will not be deleted or removed.”

Some social media also permits users to prohibit commenting on their sites and only use social media to put out information rather than receive it. Of course, comments have to be prohibited for all users, not just some.

Because the rules for how government entities and officials can moderate their online presence are often difficult to navigate, Hodge said it is important municipalities create specific social

media policies and make sure all users or moderators understand the rules.

“Again, I think it is essential that all municipalities that have a social media presence also have a social media policy,” she said. “Additionally, a municipality should follow and adhere to its policy. If a municipality does not have a written policy about what is acceptable and is not acceptable on its social media accounts, I do not think that the municipality should be deleting anything. A municipality can develop its own social media policy or use the template that MTAS staff developed. A municipality can adopt the template outright or can adopt the portions of the policy that meets the needs of the city.” When setting these policies, Hodge said cities also need to think about the platform they are using, the purpose of the account, and who will be allowed to use the account.

“From an administrative standpoint, when an account is set up, municipal staff need to determine who the administrator of the account will be and whether there should be multiple administrators,” she said. “There also needs to be some discussion about what the permissions on the account will be. Additionally, the administrators need to be cognizant of the fact that some of the content on the accounts may be subject to the municipality’s records retention schedule. So, some thought needs to be put into how that content will be captured and maintained.”

Hodge said following the simple rule of thinking before posting can also save a lot of trouble in the long-run.

“Officials need to know that the comments that they tweet or post on social media could trigger the open meetings act. Both employees and officials need to be mindful of the fact that tweets and posts could be subject to the public records act, regardless of whether the account is personal or for official municipal business,” she said. “Of paramount importance, in my opinion, municipalities need to ensure that all employees and officials – both elected and appointed – are aware of the municipality’s social media policy, receive a copy of the policy, are trained on the policy, and sign an acknowledgment of such that is maintained by the municipality.”

Additionally, municipalities should not use social media as their single platform for announcing things like upcoming meetings, events, or open hiring positions. Hodge said it is easy to forget that not everyone has access to or uses social media.

“Municipal staff has to remember that not everyone is on social media,” she said. “There are a lot of municipalities that are interested in publishing public meeting notices on social media, which is fine and one way to advertise. But, it should not be the only way that meetings and events are advertised.” Despite the hazards, Hodge said social media is a great tool for municipal governments when used correctly.

“Social media can be a great tool for sharing accurate, important information quickly,” she said. ■

for convention is also available online.

We are also working on a new project for late summer which involves hosting local luncheons around our state during the congressional summer recess to enhance our networking and outreach with our congressional delegation, state policy makers and our members.

Kayla Bass, the League's Director of External Affairs, will be collaborating with several of our newly elected officials to create a young officials' task force with the purpose of giving us insight into the resources needed not only today, but as we look five, 10 and 15 years down the road.

If you would like to receive information regarding the opportunities outlined above as well as additional information throughout the year, please ensure we have your correct contact information by reaching out to Barbara Alexander, the League's Operations Manager, at baalexander@almonline.org.

I want to close by saying that I see firsthand how the challenges from 2020 have continued into the new year. As I travel the state, I hear comments about how we must return

to some form of normalcy, and I, as much as anyone, want our communities and citizens to overcome the pandemic safely and positioned to thrive.

I wholeheartedly believe COVID-19 has brought about the opportunity to reimagine and reinvent our communities. It is my mission and vision as the leader of this organization to be ahead of the curve so we can best address whatever challenges we face today, next year and five years from today, through our advocacy efforts, strategic outreach, value-added services and legal guidance. By being out front and engaged with our local and state leaders, partners and stakeholders, we are able to continually improve and expand the tools our communities need to aid in their restart and reinvention.

Our municipalities are resilient, and the League will continue to work intentionally with state and federal leaders as well as our partners to ensure cities and towns are provided the essential resources they need.

I look forward to working with each of you. Thank you, again, for your commitment and leadership in our organization and your community. There is much that needs to be done in 2021. ■

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DesignAlabama

HELPING COMMUNITIES CREATE SPACES WHERE PEOPLE CAN LIVE,
WORK, PLAY AND PROSPER

Jessica Armstrong, DesignAlabama Contributor

Improving a community's quality of life is easier said than done. It's a complex process that requires extensive planning and citizen involvement, while bringing together policymakers, planners and design professionals to guide such an ambitious goal to fruition.

Alabama is fortunate to have DesignAlabama, an organization able to orchestrate these multifaceted endeavors. The result? Communities across the state become better places to live.

This nonprofit, citizen-led agency provides education resources and assistance in urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, industrial design, graphic design and engineering. Its primary mission is to promote the design arts and raise awareness as to how the design arts disciplines can shape our economy, and the places we call home.

DesignAlabama is driven by the belief that public demand for design excellence and aesthetic integrity are essential for a community's wellbeing and economic development. Design disciplines impact our environment in many ways and therefore must be practiced responsibly. Founded in 1987 under the Alabama State Council on the Arts, DesignAlabama is continually developing initiatives to spotlight how the design professions can transform our environment for the better.

Mayors Design Summit

Defining how we live, work and play in our communities are among the key functions of good design. For this reason, DesignAlabama holds its annual Philip A. Morris Mayors Design Summit – a program that allows participating mayors to submit a design issue facing their community and receive solutions and guidance from professional Alabama-based designers.

The Design Summit takes place over two days and brings together five mayors from various regions in the state. There is no cost for participating mayors except their own travel expenses.

During a roundtable discussion, each community design issue is discussed with all of the design professionals and mayors. The designers' recommendations are then submitted to each mayor. Providing civic leaders access to a team of experienced and high-skilled design professionals is a much-

needed service when so many cities and towns lack funding for such improvements.

Says Opelika Mayor Gary Fuller who participated in the 2015 Mayor's Design Summit: "The entire conference was worthwhile, but I especially enjoyed learning more about downtown redevelopment and improving connectivity between downtown and nearby neighborhoods."

Troy Mayor Jason Reeves also participated in the Summit and found the experience invaluable, particularly its collaborative nature. Mayors can find themselves operating in a vacuum, so to speak, and the result is little or no interaction with other mayors.

"I learned what was important to other mayors and what problems they were having," Reeves recalls, "and that gives you a different perspective that I found to be a great help. I know everyone is busy, but I encourage any mayor who has the opportunity to participate. It's time well spent."

DesignPlace

Communities that took part in the Mayors Design Summit are eligible to apply to participate in DesignPlace, another program DesignAlabama has initiated. DesignPlace allows communities represented at the Mayors Design Summit to take the "next step" in the community-enhancement process.

DesignPlace brings a team of experts into a community to show how quality of life increases when the design arts are put into action. Brainstorming ideas and generating solutions is what DesignPlace is all about. To build on a community's assets which include the built environment and natural environments, as well as the people who live there.

The program was launched in 2016 with the belief that mayors who had gained knowledge about planning and design during their time at the Summit need to share that knowledge with their community.

Through a three-day charrette process, DesignAlabama brings in a team of design experts with experience in architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, brand design and planning. The team demonstrates how the design arts disciplines can make a positive impact on community redevelopment.

One of the greatest benefits of DesignPlace is its ability to energize the public to bring about positive change in their

community. Citizen participation is essential to its success.

Objectivity is another benefit of the DesignPlace experience. As outsiders, the design team looks at each community with a keen and unbiased eye. These professional consultants examine the community's strengths and weaknesses with impartiality untainted by political ambition or economic self-interest.

Additionally, the professional skills of both the design team and non-design participants are sharpened. Participants also gain a deeper appreciation for design and the planning process.

Opelika Explores Revitalization and Connectivity

After Opelika Mayor Gary Fuller's experience with the Design Summit, in October 2017 Opelika became the first community to partake in DesignPlace. Fuller found this initiative to be as worthwhile as the Summit.

"They suggested improvements to Geneva Street, which is the best and most direct route to downtown from I-85," Fuller explains. "We are now completing an expanded sidewalk on Geneva Street and our new library is under construction near Geneva Street. Our new state-of-the-art police headquarters and municipal court facility are also on Geneva Street."

Fuller says the team placed "a lot of focus" on Opelika's historic downtown and connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods. They also looked closely at rebranding the city and working with the city's community relations officer to create a new brand story, logo, brand guidebook, signage and fleet graphics.

"We were very excited to work with DesignAlabama," says Opelika Planning Director Matt Mosley. "The city of Opelika was happy to see the early ideas and concepts from the charrette."

Of particular interest to Mosely were the concepts created for Pepperell Mill and Village and areas on the edges of downtown. On the National Register of Historic Places, the Pepperell Mill and Village is a site containing over 200 properties constructed between 1925 and 1940 by the Pepperell Manufacturing Company to provide housing for its Opelika textile mill workers. Downtown Opelika is also on the National Register.

The plan provided by DesignPlace expanded on revitalization efforts that had already taken place in downtown Opelika. Through the efforts of Opelika Main Street and other groups, progress has been made to revitalize the city.

"The value of the DesignPlace program is immeasurable," says Pam Powers-Smith, former president of the Opelika Chamber of Commerce, which partnered

MORE THAN EXPECTED. NOTHING LESS THAN GENUINE.

with DesignAlabama on Opelika's involvement with DesignPlace.

"It's like a dream to have that many experts visit and work with you on solutions to problems," she adds. "In no other setting would you have access to those people all at one time. I thoroughly enjoyed their visit and how we worked



Top: One of the most important aspects of DesignPlace is community input, here the design team is participating in one of two community gatherings during their time in Opelika.

Middle: Design professionals from many design fields spend time working together with each other and community leaders to create the best ideas for the community.

Bottom: A rendering produced during DesignPlace of reuse of the historic Pepperell Mill site.

Left: Opelika's "O" logo expresses the city's railroad history, an idea that came out of DesignPlace and created by Copperwing Design. The typography that accompanies the logo was created by Leigh Krehling with the city of Opelika. Images Courtesy of DesignAlabama and Copperwing



DesignVision and DesignDash

Do something expertly for a long time and it becomes easy to “rest on your laurels,” but that’s not the case with DesignAlabama. For more than 30 years the organization has been developing successful strategies for improving communities and continues to build on those successes. Two additions that complement DesignAlabama’s time-tested design services are DesignVision and DesignDash.

DesignVision is a community visioning workshop held in partnership with Auburn University’s Urban Studio. The workshop brings together Main Street board members, city officials and other community stakeholders, along with a design team consisting of Urban Studio students and a design professional who serves as facilitator. The two-day workshop coincides with the Urban Studio’s fall curriculum and communities are selected through an application process.

Day one is a brainstorming session. On the second day, those ideas are fine-tuned by the students and the facilitator, who then create drawings, renderings and other materials that are presented to the community, who are asked to commit to implementing the recommendations. There is an administration fee to DesignAlabama and to the Urban Studio, along with a facilitator fee, for a total of \$6,000.

In 2018, Camden, located in the Black Belt region and seat of Wilcox County, was the first town to participate in DesignVision. Camden DesignVision studied how to make the most of the town’s assets, which include tourism, natural resources and the arts, says from Sulynn Creswell, executive director of Camden’s nonprofit Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center.

“Several family-owned businesses have moved out of the downtown and we looked at ways to reinvigorate the downtown and bring businesses back,” Creswell recalls.

Programs like DesignVision galvanize communities and provide evidence to outside investors that its citizens have a vested interest in revitalizing their town. Since DesignVision, several historic buildings in downtown Camden have been purchased and are slated for reuse. The former Williams Pecan building on Broad Street was turned it into a popular gourmet restaurant and market.

Small, medium and large-scale projects came out of the DesignVision plan. A relatively easy idea is to plant trees in the commercial core. More ambitious plans include converting a short street to pedestrian-only use and creating a residential area for artists near the Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center.

“I do think [DesignVision] helped spark people,” says Creswell, and helped to make Camden “an example of what can be done in other communities in the Black Belt.”

Alex Krumdieck, director of Auburn University’s Urban Studio, says the Urban Studio was initially involved with small town planning, but evolved to work primarily in Birmingham and the surrounding area.

“We’ve reached back and are getting involved again in these small-town projects,” says Krumdieck, who notes that DesignVision is an integral part of the fall semester for fifth year students. “The objective is to build on the amenities the town already has.”

Along with tourism, natural resources and the arts, another asset is having a downtown with many older buildings intact. “[DesignVision] works really well and is an educational tool for us,” adds Krumdieck. “It’s very beneficial for students to work with a community as an actual client.”

The second town to benefit from DesignVision was Wedowee in Randolph County. Wedowee was a two-day charette, which Krumdieck says will be the norm for future DesignVision projects. It won’t be known until spring what the next DesignVision community will be for the 2021 fall semester.

After students finish drawing and analyzing, they create a series of documents that provide the community with specific, step-by-step instructions for moving forward. Some work can be tackled immediately and some implemented over time. “The aim is to leave the community with a clear-cut plan,” Krumdieck says.

Another DesignAlabama design service is **DesignDash**, a single-day blitz of design interaction between community members and design professionals. A facilitator leads discussions between community members and design professionals who focus on a site-specific design and planning issue.

During the second half of the day, the design professionals work alone to create ideas, renderings and other images based on their findings. The DesignAlabama administrative fee for DesignDash is \$3,500, along with costs to the community that may incur.

“Programs like DesignDash and DesignVision are stepping stones to introduce communities to the impact design can have, without a large time or monetary investment,” explains DesignAlabama Executive Director Gina Clifford. “The hope is that they’ll get ‘hooked’ and maybe want to participate in the Mayors Design Summit and DesignPlace. Then branch out and participate in some of the other programs out there that are offered statewide.”

together to get through the particular projects that we felt were best to tackle.”

Priceville Considers New Direction Through Community Identity

The second community to participate in DesignPlace was Priceville, the third largest municipality in Morgan County and part of the Decatur Metropolitan Area and the Huntsville-Decatur Combined Statistical Area, the second fastest growing region in Alabama. Such a prime location makes Priceville well positioned to kick off new design and planning initiatives.

DesignPlace helped guide Priceville in a new direction by providing design, planning and community identity assistance. Professional consultants gathered information

and created a preliminary “blueprint” based on input from local residents and community leaders.

Town leaders point to several factors that make Priceville ideal for change, including its crossroads location, amenities already in place, a higher-than-average median household, and commercial corridors “ripe for redevelopment.” Another advantage is the amount of land available to be developed through public and private partnerships.

A number of ideas were expressed including bringing more amenities to the commercial core. Copperwing, one of Alabama’s leading communications firms, was hired shortly after DesignPlace to design a new Priceville website.

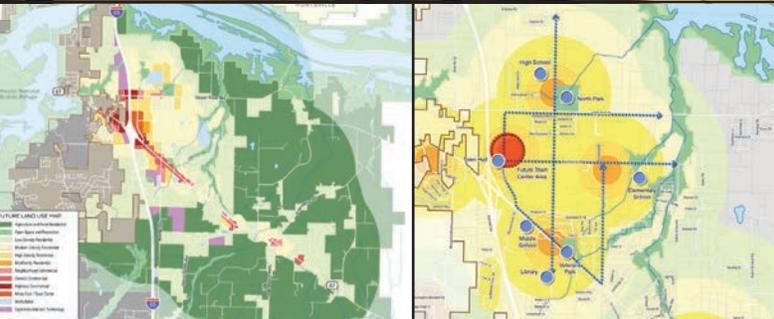
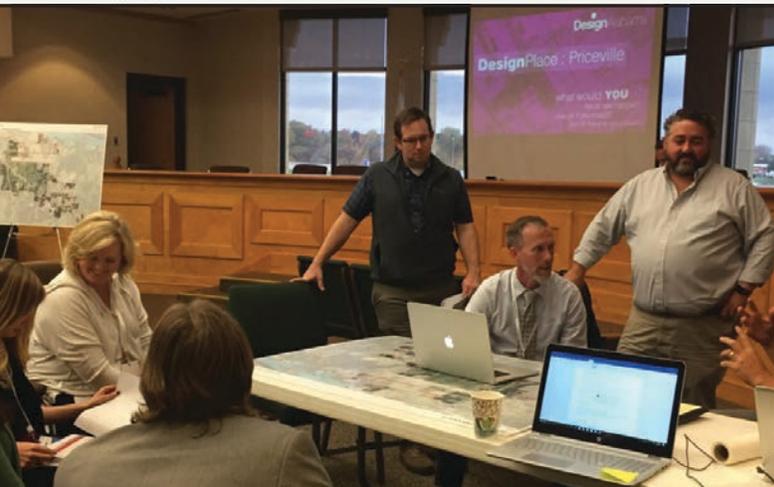
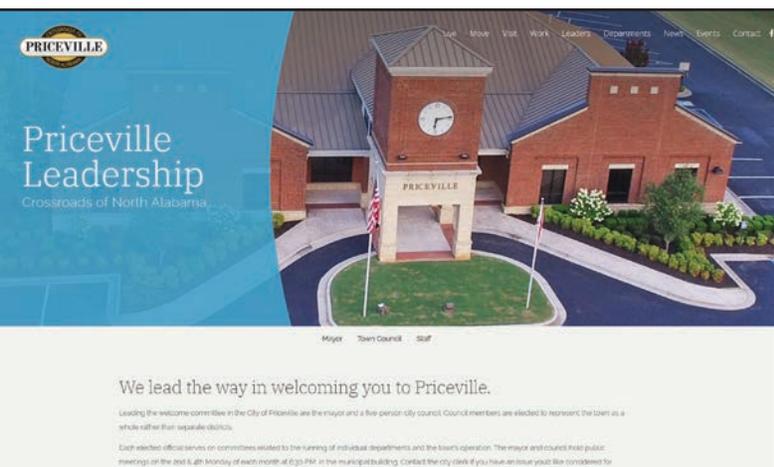
The Priceville Comprehensive Plan was developed to help Priceville manage the rapid growth that has spilled over from the Huntsville metro area, explains KPS Group Vice President and Principal Planner Jason Fondren. Because of its recent population increase, Priceville grew from a “town” to a “city” as the plan was completed, he notes.

KPS Group assisted Priceville in conducting community meetings and surveys to understand resident’s concerns with growth and aspirations for the future. The plan, now being considered by the planning commission, lays out a strategy for development that will preserve and enhance Priceville’s small-town character. Several projects are recommended to absorb increasing residential traffic on the city’s northeast side. Improvements would include sidewalks and shared use paths, says Fondren.

Priceville is also updating its zoning and subdivision regulations to assure that development proceeds as envisioned in the plan, Fondren says. Key updates will include improvements to planned development regulations, street design standards integrated with land use context and options for conservation development, originally discussed with the community during the DesignPlace program.

Troy Included Adaptive Reuse of Historic Structures

The city of Troy also participated in DesignPlace, with the aim to make the community an even better place to live, work and visit. Reimagining Troy, a DesignPlace report,



Top: After Priceville participated in DesignPlace, the city decided it needed a new website, which was created by Montgomery-based Copperwing Design based on the community’s common vision.

Middle: More than 150 residents turned out for this first meeting to discuss a new direction for their town.

Bottom Left: DesignPlace guided Priceville in a new direction and helped find ways to improve the quality of life. A map looking at future land use in Priceville was created by KPS Group, a result of the city’s participation in DesignPlace.

Bottom Right: DesignPlace brings together experts to assist with design, planning and community identity. Making the city more pedestrian friendly is part of the planning process.

*Images Courtesy of DesignAlabama, KPS Group and Copperwing Design

Branding Best Practices for Cities and Towns

Brand Systems

- Meet with city department heads to know what branding needs they have and build consensus for the branding process itself.
- Establish a brand architecture with your designer. Most systems currently consist of a city seal, the tourism brand and a downtown district brand. Also, think about how many departments require logos within your system.
- Consider use of each department sub-brand in your system and be intentional in every application – from team wear to wayfinding signage to waste containers. How will they vary from one another? Should they be color-coded? How will they be presented when used together with your city seal or tourism logos?
- Develop a clear and concise brand style guide outlining proper use, and then share with every department.

Brand Implementation

- Changing out your brand can be a daunting process, but can be done in phases.
- Create a list of priorities based on what budgeting will allow. Signage is typically the costliest.
- Consider first changing out logos for social media, website and business cards. They are more easily managed and are initial touchpoints for your brand. Next, work toward vehicles and team wear. Work your way through key communication pieces and finally wayfinding and signage.
- Share your brand-style guide with vendors and ask for a proof for any and every application of your logo in your system to ensure proper usage.

Brand Management

- Select a group of brand ambassadors among city departments to help you manage proper brand use, because you cannot be everywhere and see everything. Be sure to communicate your expectations for brand consistency to avoid costly misuse of the logos in your brand system.
- Review the status-of-use once a quarter with your brand ambassador team. What is working? What is not working? Does your style guide require any updates?
- Correct brand misuse immediately, but know that some applications will warrant flexibility. Find a balance. Adhere to the style guide. But keep in mind, there will be situations in which you will need to deviate from your standard guide.

Brand Communication

- Language is as important to your brand as visual imagery.
- Write your brand story – its mission, vision and values – and include it in your brand style guide.
- Create a tagline that your community can rally around.
- Keep a consistent tone in all communications.
- Clearly outline the benefits and amenities of your city or town targeting three distinct audience groups:
 - 1) People moving there
 - 2) Tourists visiting
 - 3) Businesses expanding.This will help unify your marketing message among everyone working to build your brand awareness.

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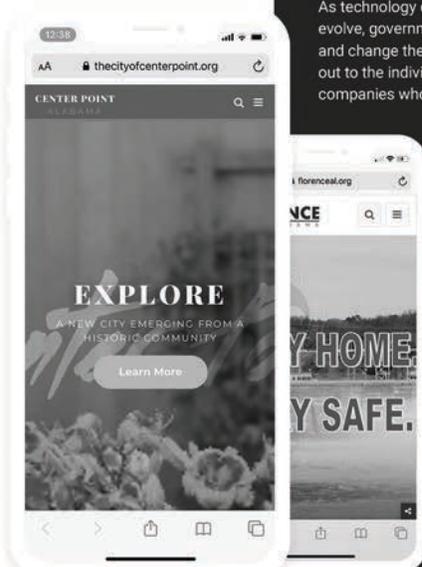
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The Government Website Experts

was created by a team of planners, architects, marketing professionals and historians. A comprehensive guide based on team observations and community input.

“DesignPlace brought some very talented design professionals,” says Troy Planning & Zoning Administrator Melissa Sanders, “and the team gave us projects to benefit the city as a whole and an overall vision that can inspire us.”

When Troy Mayor Jason Reeves participated in the 11th annual Mayors Design Summit in 2017, he expressed a desire to promote adaptive reuse of the historic Academy Street School. Though the school became the focus of Troy DesignPlace, the team also addressed other sites and various design issues. Ideas for Academy Street School include a new two-story glass entry space to connect the existing gymnasium and academic buildings. Also to convert an agricultural building into a restaurant/café.

The team also looked at making Troy more bike friendly and increase safety and connectivity. Principles of Complete Streets were applied to provide safe access to all users. The city has opened bids for a multiuse path on Park Street, says Sanders.

Ideas for well-planned growth are also in the report such as Conservation Subdivisions, a way to combat sprawl by

preserving green space while increasing density in areas slated for development. Branding was also addressed in the report, including the adoption of a new city seal.

Implementing Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper was also recommended, an approach to revitalization that supports the belief that projects do not have to be expensive and labor intensive to be effective. The report also identifies tools needed to implement ideas such as programs, tax credits and grants. Because Troy’s DesignPlace report consists of many projects and recommendations, the team advised a timeline for each stage to make the vision more attainable.

“We were just awarded a CDBG grant to help with the costs for Phase I of the Academy Street project,” says Sanders. “We are still working on funding opportunities. We also have been working on the research to get the property listed on the National Register.”

Sanders identifies aspects of DesignPlace that made participating in the program well worth the time and effort. These include gaining input from the public, along with getting an outside perspective on a multitude of disciplines – disciplines to incorporate into a plan that meets the community’s goals and needs.

Learn More

DesignAlabama offers additional services that do not require participation in the Mayor’s Design Summit. To learn more, visit www.designalabama.org or contact Gina Clifford, Executive Director at 334-549-4672 or via email at designalabama1@bellsouth.net. ■

Jessica Armstrong has been a regular contributor to DesignAlabama for more than 20 years and is extremely proud of this longtime association. During her journalism career, she worked for a number of newspapers and magazines including the Tampa Bay Times, ranked among the top 10 newspapers in the country. In addition, she taught journalism at Auburn University for 17 years. She shares a love of good design with her husband, Don Armstrong, a registered architect and former associate professor of architecture at Tuskegee University’s Robert R. Taylor School of Architecture and Construction Science. After living in Auburn for 19 years, the couple returned to Stuart, Florida, where Don grew up and spearheaded the award-winning revitalization of its downtown. They are renovating a 1955 ranch house surrounded by 100-year-old mango trees that Don climbed as a child.



Top: Community input was vital to the Troy DesignPlace Report, created by a team of planners, architects, marketing professionals and historians. Troy Mayor Jason Reeves participated in the 11th annual Mayors Design Summit, a DesignAlabama program that communities participate in prior to DesignPlace.

Bottom Left: Presentation drawings were created by the team to illustrate a variety of ideas for reimagining the city of Troy. The report includes ways to enhance the city, from readapting the historic Academy Street School to improving street safety.

Bottom Right: This colorful site plan sketch is one of many ways in which the DesignPlace team presented ideas to the city of Troy in its report.

**Images Courtesy of DesignAlabama and the City of Troy*



as well as visitors from all over North Alabama.” The Alabama Bicentennial Legacy Award for the event was “the icing on the cake for us from this wonderful chance to “Discover Our Places,” “Honor Our People” and “Share Our Stories,” the mayor adds.

Felisha Anderson, county archivist and coordinator of special historic projects for the Baldwin County Commission, also served as an official Alabama Bicentennial Ambassador. As ambassador she represented the bicentennial at events and served as a resource throughout her region of the state. As part of the Baldwin County committee, she also worked closely with county and city leadership on her county’s projects. During its regularly scheduled meeting on January 17, 2017, the Baldwin County Commission appointed 13 members to the Alabama 200, Baldwin County Bicentennial Steering Committee to plan and execute events and activities. Charged with celebrating the people, places, and events of Baldwin County that helped to make Alabama great, the committee included representation from every corner of the county, including Fort Mims Historic Site, North Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, Historic Blakeley State Park, the city of Bay Minette, the Eastern Shore and South Baldwin County.

“The Baldwin County municipalities came together in unity celebrating Alabama’s 200th birthday in some of the most unique, creative and interesting ways,” notes Anderson. “The Baldwin County Bicentennial Steering Committee received two Alabama Bicentennial Legacy Project Plaques for the Bicentennial Paintings: Three Major Battle Sites and for the Baldwin County Bicentennial Markers Project. The committee also received Alabama Bicentennial Project Commendations for two additional projects. Several of the Baldwin County local committees received Legacy Projects and Commendations as well.”

Anderson points out that these projects could not have happened without partnership and collaboration. Working together enabled the county and its towns and cities to come together on positive projects that will have lasting impact. As she says, “The Alabama 200 Bicentennial presented an opportunity for connecting the hearts of all!”

Collaboration and Partnerships Led to Success

For the Alabama 200 office, it was daunting to think through how to engage an entire state and make it worthwhile for each participating county and town. Local Activities Committee co-chairs Carrie Banks and Tami Reist guided the office in laying a foundation. Beginning in 2015, they convened representatives from around the state to identify resources and explore ideas. One important outcome was the concept of bicentennial workshops. The commission with its partners, including the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Humanities Foundation, held meetings around the state to share information about the coming commemoration and funding opportunities from the partner agencies. The public was invited to the workshops, many held in community centers, public libraries or schools. Also included in the gatherings, some of which drew more than 100 attendees, were representatives from chambers of commerce, Main Street chapters, local history and heritage groups, local arts organizations, public libraries and CVB/tourism offices.

The workshops not only gave a face to the bicentennial and let the bicentennial office and its partners share information, but they also did something obvious but invaluable: they brought people together. Sometimes those attending knew each other, but often they were meeting us and one another for the first time. We soon learned that having a chance to get to know each other and explore common interests on common ground was important. Something about people coming together in a new context or around a new opportunity ignites a little spark. Relationships formed, partnerships evolved,



Carrie Banks, Alabama League of Municipalities; Jay Lamar, Alabama Bicentennial Commission; Tami Reist, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association. Photo by Jamie Martin, Alabama Tourism Department.

and with more hands, more was accomplished. The same was true among the partner agencies and organizations. The Alabama League of Municipalities, the Alabama Historical Commission, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Alabama Tourism Department, Alabama State Council on the Arts, and so many more found that by leveraging their individual resources and working collectively, they could do so much more. Happily for the future, those relationships did not end with the bicentennial, and we believe they are one of the most important outcomes of the commemoration.

Support and Respect

Another important lesson we gained was how important a little funding can be. Thanks to the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), the bicentennial office had grant funds to help support projects and events. The funding, designated for community and county committees, as well as special projects, ranged from \$500 to \$20,000. While not winning-the-lottery level, the funds served as incentives or matching dollars and helped committees and projects get off the ground. By the conclusion of the commemoration, almost \$900,000 in grants was distributed through the bicentennial commission to more than 260 projects and events. In addition, grant-making state agencies like the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Alabama Humanities Foundation, and AHC awarded support to more than 300 additional projects.

As important as the actual funding may have been, perhaps its most important impact was as an expression of support and respect. Being able to “put your money where your mouth is” built confidence in the bicentennial effort. It also acknowledged that towns and communities were true partners, contributing their time, effort, and resources and deserving of funding. Even a little support can convey that we’re all in this together and your project is a crucial part of the whole.

Make the Most of an Opportunity

Something as significant as a state’s bicentennial represents an opportunity. In our case, there were many opportunities, including chances to acknowledge and learn about our past; to see more fully the diversity and richness of our places; and to appreciate our people, those human resources that will lead us into the future. To make the most of the opportunity, we had extraordinary gifts: the commitment of Sen. Orr and the Alabama Bicentennial Commission to providing time and resources; the resources and commitment of many partners; and perhaps most of all, the enthusiasm and hard work of our communities. Without them, the bicentennial of our state would have been a missed opportunity. Thanks to them, we can look forward with confidence in our abilities, strong networks of friends and collaborators and a foundation of pride.

In the words of Tuscaloosa Sports and Tourism CEO Don Staley: “My biggest take away from these worthwhile

projects is that Alabamians are very proud of our state and communities.” And that makes our future bright. ■

Jay Lamar served as executive director of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission from February 2014 through November 2020. She was formerly with Auburn University and now works for the Alabama Historical Commission.

From the Editor: In 2015, I was asked by Alabama Tourism Director Lee Sentell to be part of Alabama’s Bicentennial initiative by representing the League on the Alabama200 Advisory Committee and serving as co-chair of the Bicentennial Local Activities Committee, one of three statewide committees, with Tami Reist, President of Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association. This was for a three-year celebration beginning in 2017 and culminating with our state’s 200th birthday in December 2019.

Alabama was given an exceptional opportunity when the Legislature made the state’s bicentennial a priority. Under the solid leadership and steady dedication of the Bicentennial Commission’s Executive Director Jay Lamar, innumerable community and state leaders, citizens, volunteers, companies, educational institutions and organizations came together in a seldom experienced multi-year collaborative spirit that truly made Alabama shine. Cities and towns throughout Alabama, regardless of size or economic standing, were able to engage their communities and recognize their unique and special history.

Through hard work and a kindredness that was based in a collective love for Alabama, her people, places and stories, the success and impact of this multi-year Bicentennial Commemoration will far exceed any group of people or events – and is a powerful example of what can be achieved through collaboration and intentional engagement. It was my good fortune to work with and learn from so many passionate Alabamians. I’m proud of the League’s role in the Bicentennial and everything that was accomplished statewide through this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! ~ Carrie

3. Agree to disagree. Because municipalities are governed by the majority decisions of an elected body, I urge you to commit to supporting council decisions even if you were on the losing side of the majority vote. In fact, supporting a decision can be especially important when you disagree with it. It is the action of the body you were elected to represent. Attacking it outside the meeting rarely accomplishes anything constructive. The same goes for the mayor, if at the end of the day, you are on the “losing” side of a decision by the majority vote of the council, it is your job, as the chief executive officer of your municipality to make sure the decision is carried out.

Mayors and councilmembers who refuse to support council decisions can be astoundingly destructive to the effective administration of municipal government. This open refusal on the part of an elected official encourages others to attack the entity and its decisions. This type of behavior results in the undermining of municipal government, bad press, loss of faith from your constituency and ultimately a change in leadership come next election cycle.

Always examine your motives and again, manage your expectations. If you continue to oppose a decision after it has been made, are you truly acting in the best interests of your community? Or are you so committed to your individual notions and goals that you simply cannot accept that the majority of your fellow elected officials could reach a different conclusion? If you are consistently taking positions that differ from those made by the body, it doesn't mean you are wrong or that your position isn't important, but it does mean that perhaps it is time to listen more closely and find constructive ways to have your voice be heard.

4. Beware of “Fake News” and ask informed questions. Presumptions and assumptions are dangerous. Seeking information is part of the investigatory process. Learn about issues facing your municipality, then ask questions to learn more. And if you are unclear what issue is being discussed, ask questions to find out. It is important that you understand from all angles what decisions are on the table. Problems will arise if you draw conclusions without conducting an adequate inquiry or, even worse, act on factually or legally incorrect information to force the council to reach a particular outcome. Much more often than any of us care to admit, we present information as fact that is based on nothing more than conclusions we've drawn without a thorough investigation. Ask questions, gather information and make sure the information is properly vetted.

5. Talk less, smile more. It has never been as easy as it is today to express a viewpoint to vast numbers of people. Some social commentators have suggested that this may lead some to feel that they must try to demonstrate their expertise on every subject or voice an opinion on every subject. As Abraham Lincoln once said, it is better to remain silent and

be thought a fool than open your mouth and remove all doubt.

You should feel free to express yourself, but don't express yourself for the sole goal of making sure you've had your say. Comments should be succinct as well as relevant. And if someone else has already made your point, it may be sufficient to simply say “I agree.”

6. Keep confidential information confidential. So, what happens when a councilmember reveals information that is discussed during an executive session, or when they share information outside a meeting with another member only to have it disclosed at an inopportune time or even revealed in the media? We regularly get calls asking whether a councilmember has violated the law by coming out of executive session and “spilling the beans.” The answer is no, they haven't violated the law. But what they have done is violate the trust of every other participant in the executive session.

Of course, council meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act (OMA). This advice should not be taken as encouraging discussions on municipal business outside a publicly convened meeting. However, the confidentiality of discussions held in compliance with the OMA should be respected.

Without trust, there can be no transparent communication. Members must know that they can trust other members. One of the reasons state law recognizes the right of councils to meet in executive session is so that the members will be able to freely discuss sensitive matters. If you disclose the content of these discussions, that freedom has been destroyed.

Conclusion

The simple fact is that you got elected to serve your municipality, not alone, but with a group of other individuals and *all* of you were elected by the citizens of your municipality to serve and represent them. Each official brings his or her own set of ideals, goals, dreams and experiences to the job. While you don't have to be best friends with them, it is imperative that you get along with them. The success of your municipality and your success as an elected official depend on it. And at the end of the day, your sanity and peace of mind depends on it! Conflicts, though, are an inevitable consequence of serving as a municipal official. Negotiation and compromise will be necessary to become the best official you can be. By working together with your fellow officials, you will hopefully find municipal service rewarding and exciting, and help your community grow and develop. Good luck in the days ahead. We appreciate your service to your community. Know that the League Legal Department is here to help guide you and your fellow officials as you carry out the duties you were elected to perform and that the spirit of cooperation and compromise will always be our guiding principle as we help you navigate the legal issues your municipality will face in the years ahead. ■



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