Cities Fighting Sea Level Rise

The battle begins with collaboration and information

See p. 30

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- SOPCHOPPY
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If you are looking for a cost-effective way to get your company’s message out to Florida’s municipal officials, *Quality Cities* can help. *Quality Cities* is dedicated to the state’s top elected and appointed city officials, with Florida’s 412 municipalities as its target audience. Published bimonthly, the magazine reaches approximately 4,100 people.

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The battle begins with collaboration and information

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Contact Lindsey Larson
Account Executive
llarson@flcities.com
920.606.9716
We’re Halfway Through Session

Let’s take it up a notch

As we move toward the finish line of the 2019 legislative session, we need your voice to be heard in Tallahassee. We need you engaged in the process.

There are multiple ways to get involved. Are you participating in our Monday morning call-ins? Are you reading the legislative bulletins each Friday and answering our calls to action? Are you sharing with your senator and representative how a bill will affect your city and your residents?

The Florida League of Cities legislative advocates are experienced and talented. They know the issues being heard at the Capitol, but only you can give legislators specific examples of how proposed legislation will impact your city.

Don’t forget the importance of engaging residents by educating them on Home Rule.

We Live Local

I’ve been meeting with numerous organizations and spoken with hundreds of citizens to help them understand what Home Rule is and its importance to their city. Our residents can bolster our numbers and influence.

I encourage you to reach out to your citizens. Share information directly or host educational events for residents as the Ridge, Space Coast, Suncoast and Treasure Coast Leagues of Cities have recently done. (See the We Live Local article on p. 24 for some examples.)

The We Live Local website (flcities.com/WeLiveLocal) gives you the resources you need to take action. There’s still time to submit opinion pieces to your local media. We give you examples. You can still speak to local community groups, neighborhood associations and religious organizations. We provide sample speeches.

Your residents can go to that same website. There they can sign up to get more involved in the fight for Home Rule, access our Citizen Action Guide and receive periodic calls to action during session.

I encourage you to keep spreading the word. We need the flexibility to come up with our own solutions and not be preempted with one-size-fits-all attempts by legislators. We live local, so we should decide local. That’s the heart of Home Rule.

Will you continue the fight to protect Home Rule? The time is now.

Leo E. Longworth
**LANDMARK**

**North Miami Beach Fountain Restoration**

The 32-foot historic Fulford Fountain in North Miami Beach is being restored. It’s one of the largest fountains in South Florida and has been a prominent landmark since 1925. With help from a state grant, the City of North Miami Beach tapped conservation and masonry restoration experts to head up the rehabilitation of this structure on the National Register of Historic Places.

According to Frank Ruiz, capital improvement project manager, the restoration process is laborious with sharp attention to detail. “Slowly revealing the original fountain required a great deal of patience, hundreds of sanding discs and historical know-how,” he said.

**PHOTO COURTESY OF CITY OF NORTH MIAMI BEACH**

**FUNDING**

**Estero, Pinecrest Close Bank Loans Through FMLC**

The Village of Estero and the Village of Pinecrest have closed bank loans through the Florida Municipal Loan Council’s Competitive Capital Access Program.

The Estero loan was issued for $20 million. The loan proceeds, along with a $4.6 million down payment from the village, were used to purchase 62 acres along the Estero River.

The Pinecrest loan was issued for $2.6 million. It was issued to fund capital projects including improvements to the Pinecrest Community Center, improvements to the Pinecrest Municipal Center/Library, improvement to Pinecrest Gardens, monument entrance signs to the village and improvements to parks.

For more information about the Florida Municipal Loan Council, contact Molly Button at mbutton@flcities.com.

**KUDOS**

**DeFuniak Springs Recognized**

The Village of DeFuniak Springs has been named the best small town in Florida by the news publication Insider. Insider went state by state to find small towns with an excess of activities for locals and visitors.

“Being named ‘The Best Small Town in Florida’ is a testament to our heritage and culture of being a traditional southern town,” said Jay Evans, executive director of Main Street DeFuniak Springs. “We are defined by our hospitality, tradition, community and warmth to our neighbors and guests.”

**PHOTO © GETTY IMAGES**

**GRANTS**

**Palmetto Bay Has Received $30 Million in Funding**

The Village of Palmetto Bay received $30 million in grants and partnerships since incorporation in 2003. This village with a population of 24,138 has received $17 million of that total in the last four years. The funding is used for road and parks improvements, safety initiatives and other projects.

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“Being named ‘The Best Small Town in Florida’ is a testament to our heritage and culture of being a traditional southern town,” said Jay Evans, executive director of Main Street DeFuniak Springs. “We are defined by our hospitality, tradition, community and warmth to our neighbors and guests.”
RECREATION

West Melbourne Takes Over Special-Needs Sports Complex

The City of West Melbourne has agreed to assume ownership of the Space Coast Field of Dreams special-needs sports complex. The complex hosts leagues for players with disabilities.

The nonprofit Space Coast Field of Dreams, Inc. will give the city its financial assets: about $315,000 in cash, $191,833 in outstanding pledged donations and all future donations.

Aerial of entire park, with Field of Dreams in foreground.

CONSOLIDATION

Panama City Opens New City Hall

The City of Panama City recently opened a new 60,000-square-feet City Hall as the city celebrated its 110th birthday. The new building provides space for city departments to be consolidated under one roof. The new Community Services office will allow citizens to access Code Enforcement, Community Redevelopment Agency, Community Development and Planning services in one space.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF WEST MELBOURNE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF PANAMA CITY

MEETING CALENDAR

MAY 29-JUNE 1
Florida City and County Management Association Annual Conference
Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista
Contact Carol Russell

JUNE 8-12
Florida Government Finance Officers Association Annual Conference
Diplomat Beach Resort, Hollywood
Contact Jill Walker

JUNE 23-26
Florida Association of City Clerks Summer Conference & Academy
Renaissance Resort at World Golf Village, St. Augustine
Contact Rachel Embleton

JULY 11-13
Florida Municipal Attorneys Association Annual Seminar
The Breakers, Palm Beach
Contact Lisa Dove

JULY 21-25
Florida Local Government Information Systems Association Annual Conference
Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek
Contact Becky Brennan

AUGUST 15-17
Florida League of Cities Annual Conference
World Center Marriott, Orlando
Contact Melanie Howe

OCTOBER 4-6
Institute for Elected Municipal Officials
Holiday Inn Tampa Westshore
Contact Heidi Hogarth

OCTOBER 13-17
Florida Association of City Clerks Fall Academy
The Shores Resort & Spa, Daytona Beach
Contact Rachel Embleton

OCTOBER 16-18
Florida Redevelopment Association Annual Conference
Hilton Tampa Downtown
Contact Jan Piland

OCTOBER 21-25
Florida Government Finance Officers Association School of Governmental Finance
Hilton Sandestin Beach Golf Resort & Spa
Contact Jill Walker

GO TO:
floridaleagueofcities.com/university/calendar-of-events or call (850) 222-9684 for more information.
DID YOU KNOW...

‘Greatest Show on Earth’ Has Florida Connections?

Long before a friendly mouse drew millions of visitors to Florida, the Ringling Bros. Circus was the largest attraction in the state.

The circus traces its roots to 1768 when a British cavalry officer, Philip Astley, performed acts on horseback. The modern-day Ringling Bros. Circus stopped in May 2017, but its presence is still apparent in Florida, particularly in the Sarasota area. Many former circus performers and workers live there.

The Ringling Circus Museum in Sarasota is in two buildings on the same property as the John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Art. The museum includes a model circus that shows what the circus looked like when it traveled with 1,300 workers and held performances in a tent that held up to 15,000 people. The model is done to scale; each ¾ inch represents one foot. It was designed by Howard Tibbals.

The museum includes original circus wagons and a Pullman train car that has been restored. John and Mabel Ringling crossed the country in the train car collecting art and finding circus acts.

The museum includes a film narrated by actor Hal Holbrook that shares about the Ringlings, the circus history and the construction of the Ringlings’ home and museum. John Ringling built the museum in 1928 and willed it to the state.

The Tibbals Learning Center next door includes a model of a circus parade. The center also has historical circus artifacts, including costumes and props. There is a canon that shot performers across the tent. The center includes paper collections including the lithographic posters used to advertise circuses. For those who are interested in experiencing what it felt like to be a part of the circus, visitors can squeeze into a clown car and walk a tightrope.

Those who are nostalgic for circus performances can see Sailor Circus and Circus Sarasota in a big top tent near the Mall at University Town Center in Sarasota. Also, the Florida State University Flying High Circus performs in Tallahassee and at Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Ga.

Sources: FloridaRambler.com and ringling.org

Sunrise and Miami Officials Named to NLC Groups

Sunrise Deputy Mayor Mark A. Douglas has been appointed by the National League of Cities to the 2019 Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations (FAIR) federal advocacy committee. The committee has the lead responsibility for developing policy positions on areas including economic policy, financial programs, liability insurance and intergovernmental relations.

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez has been appointed to the NLC Task Force on Housing. The task force addresses how communities can better respond to the challenge of housing availability, investment and quality. It will develop a set of best and promising practices at the local level, as well as policy recommendations for federal and state governments.

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Obituaries

Chiefland Mayor Betty Walker

**Chiefland Mayor Betty J. Walker** has died at age 72. Walker was the first African-American female elected official for the City of Chiefland. She was the mayor since 2016 and was an elected city official for more than 15 years. Walker was known as a great leader who loved her community immensely. She was passionate about recreation and was known for always having a vision for the city. She had been employed by the Levy Association of Retarded Citizens for almost 40 years.

Crescent City Commissioner Marcus Hardy

**Crescent City Commissioner Marcus J. Hardy** has died at age 48. He served on the CRA Advisory Committee before being elected as a city commissioner in 2015. Hardy served as a member of the Florida League of Cities 2018 Legislative Committee and was serving as a member of the League’s Transportation & Intergovernmental Relations Committee. He helped revitalize Crescent City parks, including updated playground equipment and the restructuring of a gazebo. He was a member of Concerned Citizens of South Putnam and Habitat for Humanity. He was a leader and mentor for young men in Boyz II Men and an organizer of the community food drive at Howe Memorial United Methodist Church. Hardy was known as a visionary who pursued new ideas in hopes of making Crescent City a better place to live.

Eagle Lake Commissioner Michael Burdelak

**Eagle Lake Commissioner Michael (Mike) Burdelak** has died at age 62. Burdelak had been a city commissioner since April 2017. In May 2017, he was appointed to serve on the Eagle Lake Community Redevelopment Agency as vice chairman, and he was reappointed in 2018. He served on the Planning Commission as chairman and vice chair prior to his election to the City Commission. “Mike joined the commission with enthusiasm and ambition to help better his community,” said Eagle Lake Mayor Cory Coler. “He was a veteran, a teacher and gave much of his time to our city. He strove to help make our city a better place, and our city, as well as our commission, will dearly miss him.”

Former Groveland Councilman John Griffin

**John Griffin** has died at age 74. He served on the Groveland City Council for 17 years. Despite an illness that sometimes required medical staff to transport him to meetings, he finished his final term in fall 2018. Griffin supported many initiatives including a senior center, playgrounds, a dog park, a community center and a historical museum. He was a respected authority on black and Seminole history, and he lectured around the state. “In a time when it seems people are quick to draw lines and find ways to differentiate themselves from others, Councilman Griffin showed us how we are better off working to find commonalities and shared purpose,” Groveland City Manager Mike Hein said in a message that informed city employees of Griffin's passing. “To the end, he was full of grace.”

KUDOS

**Seven Honored as Digital Cities**

**Coral Gables** was one of five nationwide first-place winners in the 2018 Digital Cities Survey by the Center for Digital Government. The annual survey recognizes cities using technology to tackle social challenges, enhance cybersecurity, improve transparency and more. Coral Gables was awarded for its business intelligence portals and dashboards, transparency and open data portals, smart city projects with internet of things sensors and platforms, and use of Lean Six Sigma processes.

Other winners include **Tamarac** (second place), **North Port** (fifth place), **Weston** (ninth place) and **Punta Gorda** (10th place) in the category of up to 75,000 population; **Cape Coral** (second place) in the 125,000-249,999 population; and **Miami** (fifth place) in the 250,000-499,999 population.

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We often imagine virtue as a trait that a person has or does not have. It’s not a matter of degree, but a simple matter of fact.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle thought differently. For Aristotle, virtue was a “sweet spot” on a continuum of attitude and behavior. It was not a discrete thing as much as a quantity of an attribute that was neither too little nor too much.

Consider honesty.

For Aristotle, the virtue we call honesty lies on a continuum. As a person travels one way along the continuum, the journey is toward less and less honesty. Ultimately, the person becomes dishonest, a liar.

Travel the other direction, and the person journeys toward more and more honesty, to the point where that, too, becomes a vice. Truth-telling becomes brutal, vicious and destructive.

In other words, while there is such a thing as too little honesty, there also is such a thing as too much. Honesty as a virtue lies between these two extremes. Aristotle argued that this statement was true of all virtue. To be virtuous was not a matter of living by absolutes, but of living by degrees.

Contemporary public life tends to drive us toward extremes and away from Aristotle’s “golden mean.” If an official is a proponent of environmental preservation, he or she must always take the environmental position. If an official is an advocate for local business, he or she must always champion that point of view.

If public leaders advocate a position that is not the strongest one for a cause they were thought to champion, their base accuses them of hypocrisy. Feeling betrayed, the base rallies to the banner of a new hero who assures them that he or she will never compromise.

Public virtue as an absolute.

This notion of public virtue is incompatible with democracy. It guarantees, in a society of varied interests and convictions, that government policies veer erratically between the preferences of temporary legislative majorities or stagnate in response to electoral margins too small to allow any majority to take charge. The result? Rising public distrust.

Should one faction emerge that is large enough and stable enough to command majority control of the levers of government for a sustained period, the resulting policies are likely to place undue burdens on many and grant unjust benefits to those in power. Determined factions of this type, if not thwarted by institutional barriers, can entrench themselves in power so effectively that only an outraged and overwhelming new majority in opposition can restore a just distribution of power, if they don’t
become abusive in turn. This is what our country’s founders feared: tyranny of the majority.

None of this seems virtuous.

There is a great need today for public leaders who seek the sweet spot that avoids the extremes of too much and too little of the virtues relevant to the public sphere.

Consider courage and humility.

Public leadership, especially in difficult times, takes courage. Officials must have the courage of their convictions so that they are not easily swayed by passing popular fancies or strong political pressure. Officials also must have the courage to do what is right even when many urge them to do what is wrong; otherwise, abuse of power follows in the trail of elections like mushrooms after the rain.

Aristotle counsels us that courage, as a virtue, is a sweet spot, not an extreme. Too little courage is easy. We call it cowardice.

Too much courage? Perhaps that’s recklessness, excessive pride or overconfidence. We are so “brave” that nothing prompts us to pause and consider our path. If we are fortunate in our choice of path, no problem. If not, and we “courageously” charge ahead, then there is disaster.

Political courage as a virtue lies somewhere between these extremes. People are not afraid to stand for what they believe, but neither are they foolish enough to think that they ought to charge headlong into any battle, regardless of the seriousness of the issue at hand or the likelihood of success.

It is not courageous to strive to do the right thing without any regard for the best way to achieve it. That’s just being foolhardy. Better to assess the situation thoughtfully, not out of fear, but with an eye to achieving the best outcomes in the short and the long run. Political courage may mean compromising and getting attacked for it to get a part of a policy adopted when inflexibility would have looked good but produced nothing. Such compromise exhibits neither a defect nor an excess of courage, but courage at the sweet spot of virtue.

Then there’s humility. I know what you’re thinking. Humility and politicians? Seriously?

Absolutely.

We readily recognize the lack of humility in many public figures. They seem to be oblivious to their human weaknesses and moral failings. Even when caught flatfooted in an error or a lie, such “leaders” do not humbly acknowledge that they are mere mortals. Instead, they pivot to attacks against a person, rather than the person’s position, or swift topic changes to avoid any suggestion that they are flawed.


But is there such a thing as an excess of humility? More importantly for our purposes, do we ever find it in public leaders?

“A virtue ... is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate.”

Yes, we do.

After decades of experience with political leaders, I can say with great confidence that most of my experiences with excessively humble public servants have come in conversations with municipal officials: councilmembers, commissioners and mayors. I’ve also had this experience in conversations with clerks, attorneys and managers who provide professional services to cities.

I’ve known quite a few who were, indeed, too modest about the importance of the work they do and their capacity and determination to do it. They viewed their public service either as a small thing (“I’m just giving back to my community”) or something almost inevitable (“This is just what I do”).

Public service, done well, is neither. It’s not a little thing at all to refuse to get drunk on other people’s praise, to treat office and title as a solemn duty rather than a badge of privilege. It’s also not the least bit inevitable, which is attested by the occasional painful headline about local officials who betray the public trust and the more frequent stories of power politics at the state and national levels.

Public service, done well, is a great and decisive thing. It is as important as skilled surgery to a suffering patient, as powerful as faithful love to a broken heart. It’s as precious as water to a people thirsting for public services worthy of the name.

Doing public service well requires virtue, not in the extremes but in the moderation of all things good that Aristotle saw as the essence of moral character. It is taking ourselves seriously enough to know we make a critical difference while holding our dignity lightly enough that even gross assaults do not upend us. It is taking our responsibility for sustaining and advancing the good of our communities seriously enough that we develop firm convictions while acknowledging that other opinions and those who hold them have a place in the work we do.

That’s what public virtue looks like. And that’s what we desperately need to see.

Scott C. Paine, Ph.D., is director of leadership development and education for FLC University. He previously worked at the University of Tampa as associate professor of communication and government and served for eight years on Tampa’s City Council. He can be contacted at spaine@flcities.com.

GO TO: drscottpaine.com to read Scott Paine’s regular blog.
Florida League of Cities
93rd Annual Conference
Thursday, August 15 – Saturday, August 17, 2019
World Center Marriott, Orlando

WHY SHOULD I ATTEND?

The Florida League of Cities Annual Conference is an opportunity for municipal officials and senior staff to enhance leadership skills, learn from municipal experts, share ideas with peers, discuss strategies for Florida's future, and hear about the latest in products and services designed for municipal governments.

This year will have breakout-sessions, committees, keynotes, awards and more. Plus, we will be discussing and adopting our legislative action agenda to guide advocacy efforts at our state's capitol. Don't miss this opportunity to learn, network and share.

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May 1-August 1
- City/County/Gov $550
- Corporate $650
- Guest $150
- Youth Council Saturday Program $75
- Exhibit Hall Pass Only $50
  (does not include access to Saturday events)

NOTE: Fees will increase for late and on-site registrations.

MEALS INCLUDED

- Thursday, August 15: Light Reception
- Friday, August 16: Continental Breakfast, Light Reception
- Saturday, August 17: Continental Breakfast, Lunch, Buffet Dinner

VENUE

World Marriott Center
8701 World Center Drive
Orlando, FL 32821
(407) 239-4200
Room Rate: $176/night + 12.5%

Note: Reservations can be made only with the FLC-provided group rate code distributed with your registration confirmation. Please do not contact the hotel to make reservations until you receive this code.

EVENT ORGANIZER/CONTACT

For questions and additional information, please contact Meetings Manager Melanie Howe at (850) 222-9684 or mhowe@flcities.com.

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Members can speak with an attorney Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time) by calling (888) 368-FMIT (3648).

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Ryan Combs, CPA, an accountant in the Finance Department at the Florida League of Cities, is known for his positive and considerate attitude toward others.

His smile lights up the room, according to Alicia Hollinger, a rater who has worked with Bryan for three years at the League. “He is a joy to be around,” Alicia says. “He always has a way of making you laugh.”

Alicia has never met a person whom Bryan doesn’t get along with. “I have never heard him speak negative about anyone or on any situation,” Alicia says. “He can find the positive in almost anything.”

Bryan handles invoices for the Florida Municipal Insurance Trust and the Florida Association of Counties Trust. He also handles financial reports, health financial statements and other reports for management.

As with any job, some days are more challenging than others. “No matter how stressful a situation or season may be, he offers supportive and encouraging words,” says Medley Johnson, an FLC underwriter who has worked with Bryan for eight years at the League. “Sometimes a warm smile is needed during stressful moments.”

Bryan, who has worked at the League for 11 years, always makes time for co-workers, Alicia says. “If I have questions about anything, he will always stop what he is doing to help,” she says. “If Bryan does not have an answer, he will make sure he finds a way to get you an answer.”

Bryan’s favorite experiences at the League involve interacting with others. He recalls a running group that ran a half marathon. Bryan also enjoyed his time on the Impact Committee, which plans companywide events. “My fellow employees really enjoy the festivities,” he says.

When he completed three years on the Impact Committee, he helped transition new committee members into their roles and even took the committee to a new level, says Binh Nguyen, Bryan’s supervisor. Bryan also helped mentor a new member of the finance staff, Binh says. “He’s approachable, kind and patient,” he says. Bryan was previously recognized by the FLC with the Heart and Soul Award for inspiring to bring out the best in people.

Bryan enjoys spending time with family members and friends at events and theme parks. He has lived with his partner, Malcolm, for 10 years and has one sibling in New York. He wants to do more traveling, particularly on the West Coast and internationally. Other hobbies include crocheting and playing his cello.

He enjoys going to wine tastings, and there’s a constant flow of people who want to talk to Bryan and take photos with him, says Becky Lesher, a co-worker for about 10 years. “I tell him he has his own little entourage.” QC
Nestled in the heart of the City of Green Cove Springs and along the banks of the St. Johns River, Spring Park and its spring-fed pool put the city on the map as a tourist destination for the rich and influential at the end of the 19th century. Visitors flocked by riverboat to the city for the spring’s prescribed healing properties, creating a boom of hotels and other businesses throughout Green Cove Springs. That boom ended around 1912 with the completion of Henry Flagler’s East Coast Railway, allowing visitors to travel farther south in Florida and marking the decline of riverboat travel.

In 2015, the Green Cove Springs was ready to rekindle Spring Park as the city’s point of growth. The pool was in need of structural repairs, and the former City Hall building next to it had been demolished. The City Council approved a $2.4 million reconstruction of Spring Park pool and surrounding facilities in January 2016. Clay County Board of Commissioners provided $700,000, the State of Florida provided $250,000 and the city paid the remainder of the cost.

The reconstruction project started in April 2016. It included reconstructing the 135,000-gallon spring-fed pool, building a new two-story pavilion with bathrooms and a concession area on the first floor in place of the demolished City Hall building, a splash pad, new walkways and wheelchair accessible ramps, and new barrier and signage around the spring.

After the reconstruction was completed in June 2017, use of the pool and Spring Park increased almost immediately. Pool attendance increased from between 2,000 to 3,000 visitors in a summer to more than 17,000 visitors in summer 2018.

“Come any weekend, and the park is packed,” said Mike Null, assistant city manager of Green Cove Springs. “It wasn’t necessarily that way before.”
Null said that the city invests in park upgrades and improvements because parks are the one area that can attract visitors, as well as serve residents.

Since the Spring Park reconstruction project, Green Cove Springs has been able to complete other park projects through four grants it received in 2018. The city received two grants of $50,000 each in April from the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program for Vera Francis Hall Park and Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center; a $200,000 matching grant in June from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for further improvements across Spring Park; and a Legislative Line Item Special Appropriations Grant of $600,000 in October to rebuild and rehabilitate portions of the city pier.

A SPRING FOR NEW BUSINESS

Reconstruction of the Spring Park pool brought more than just residents and visitors into downtown Green Cove Springs. The new pool, spring enclosure and pavilion also inspired new business development in downtown properties that needed revitalization.

Since breaking ground for pool reconstruction, downtown Green Cove Springs has become the headquarters for two businesses: Vallencourt Construction and Visual FX, a custom paint and collision repair shop. New businesses have also revitalized the historic Clay Theatre and rebuilt the site of a former barbecue restaurant into a Burger King location.

Paul Holman, the owner of Visual FX, said that the history and residential building growth attracted him to Green Cove Springs. Growing up in Clay County and a Green Cove Springs resident for 11 years, he chose the building of the former Fred Davis Buick Dealership because of its history, size and proximity to amenities in downtown.

“I love what they’ve done with the spring and pool and how it’s growing, but still keeping the small-town feel,” said Holman.

Daniel Vallencourt of Vallencourt Construction echoed Holman’s sentiments when talking about why he and his father decided to move the company’s headquarters from Middleburg in Clay County to Green Cove Springs. Vallencourt said he not only wanted a larger space but a location that would be easily seen by clients.

“What we saw here was a bunch of untapped potential,” said Vallencourt. “We’re looking 10 years down the road, and Green Cove Springs will look totally different with new buildings and local attractions.”

The completion of Vallencourt Construction headquarters inspired Vallencourt’s wife, Andrea, to purchase the Clay Theatre and renovate it into a private event space. Formerly an opera house turned into a single-screen movie theater, the theatre already has 36 weddings booked through 2020, Daniel said.

Green Cove Springs City Council Member Van Royal sees the reconstruction of the Spring Park pool as a catalyst for business growth in the city. That redevelopment along with the city being a large part of the Florida Department of Transportation’s First Coast Expressway has positioned Green Cove Springs to be part of future growth in Clay County and Northeast Florida.

“We’re here, we’re important to the county, and we are excited to see things develop and grow,” said Royal.

Tiffanie Reynolds is communications coordinator for the City of Green Cove Springs. QC
Sopchoppy: Making A Small City Even Better

New park is launching point for downtown plan

by Lara Edwards
City of Sopchoppy

The City of Sopchoppy, located 45 minutes south of Tallahassee, may be small, but it is dreaming big. Sopchoppy’s City Council and citizens are polishing up this jewel of a town by improving streetscapes, upgrading amenities and attracting small businesses.

Its newest amenity is Depot Park. This 1.5-acre property was donated in 2011 by a local family to the City of Sopchoppy. Its location is perfectly situated directly across the street from Sopchoppy’s historic Train Depot Museum on Rose Street. Over a few years, planning for the park progressed steadily. Financing was budgeted yearly from the city, and a $50,000 grant was obtained through the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program to offset pavilion construction and playground costs.

Today, Sopchoppy’s beautiful new Depot Park includes a paved walking trail, attractive lighting from sundown to sunrise, two picnic pavilions, a playground and open green space. Coming this spring is a music pavilion, the final component of the park’s master plan. The pavilion will serve as a venue for musical performances, special events and movie screenings. Depot Park also provides a much-needed public area for festivals and other events, especially Sopchoppy’s Annual Worm Grunting festival that occurs on the second Saturday in April.

When planning for landscaping within the park, the initial concept featured a butterfly garden and a few native flowering plants. Over time, this concept evolved into a parkwide native landscaping plan developed by a team of plant experts and enthusiasts. Local plant expert David Roddenberry collected plants and seeds indigenous to the Sopchoppy area. Roddenberry’s goal was to have native landscaping in the park that was specific to the Sopchoppy area and was representative of how it looked in the past. The list of plants grew to include a wide variety that attracted butterflies and was also food for birds.

Horticulturist Betsy Smith formed a comprehensive landscape plan and hand-staked and labeled every plant location. Lynn Artz, a former Wakulla County commissioner, coordinated the planting dates, implementation and volunteers. Several organizations were involved including the Sarracenia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, Keep Wakulla County Beautiful and the Wakulla County Garden Club, along with many other community volunteers.

Trees and wildflowers are planted, and additional wildflowers are being sown and will be planted this spring. All plants are labeled so that visitors can familiarize themselves with the varying species.

The planting of all native trees, shrubs and flowers in Depot Park creates a beautiful focal point coming into downtown Sopchoppy. The city hopes to continue this theme throughout the downtown corridor.

The City of Sopchoppy is positioned for continued growth that complements and preserves its unique small-town ambience through a combined effort to fund planning and placemaking efforts. To accomplish this goal, the city applied in 2018 for Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) Technical Assistance...
(TA) funding. The city also hired the Apalachee Regional Planning Council to provide strategic placemaking services.

To enhance the unique identity of its downtown, Sopchoppy and the ARPC are exploring themes and treatments to roads, lots and buildings that will spotlight the city’s history as a railroad outpost and capture its quaint and inviting character. The city held a Placemaking Committee meeting in late 2018 and will finalize these strategies in 2019.

It is critical to have this input from citizens and stakeholders involved in the process. The more input, ideas and collaboration, the better for the city.

The DEO approached Sopchoppy about pivoting from a TA grant to a Competitive Florida Partnership grant. The department saw a good fit between the city’s economic development aims and the assistance provided by Competitive Florida. As such, the city is gearing up to follow its placemaking foray with a full-scale economic development effort.

Over the next year, the city will continue to engage residents and businesses as it creates its first action-oriented economic development strategy. The best part is that this strategy will accompany the original aim of its planning grant submission: to update the city’s Land Development Code, streamline permitting and ensure building projects that enhance the downtown character.

The City of Sopchoppy will continue to strive to improve its economy while preserving and enriching what makes it unique for its citizens and visitors alike.

Lara Edwards is mayor of the City of Sopchoppy.
Venice Engages All Ages
Events connect the city to its citizens

by Lorraine Anderson
City of Venice

The City of Venice is continually strengthening its community outreach efforts to residents. The Make a Difference Day, reading outreach to schools, and community bicycle rides are powerful examples of how city officials and staff members connect with citizens of all ages.

Venice’s sixth annual Make a Difference Day held last October saw a record turnout of 447 people, and the participants ranged in age from 6 to 86.

Volunteers raked, mulched, cleaned play structures, repaired benches, built picnic tables, trimmed vegetation and cleaned up green spaces. “More importantly, this event brings together Venice city residents, church leaders, service groups, nonprofits, local school students, city staff, City Council members and Sarasota County commissioners with one common goal: to beautify the city we all love,” said Public Works Director James Clinch.

The city benefits in ways beyond community engagement, Clinch said. “The Make a Difference Day efforts save the city thousands of dollars annually,” he said.

Members of the city staff are a critical piece of the day’s success. Staff from the Parks and Utilities departments arrived at 5:00 a.m. to deliver materials to the parks. City Hall employees welcomed and registered volunteers at the Venice Community Center.

Volunteers worked at 25 city parks and green spaces and had widespread impact. They made playgrounds safer with a generous covering of mulch, and they wiped down play structures and benches. Volunteers replaced worn slats on more than 50 benches. They constructed 14 picnic tables for residents and visitors.

Volunteers removed thousands of tree limbs, invasive plants and weeds. They collected nearly one ton of debris of every kind. Volunteers served food to 305 of the participants at a free barbecue held at Maxine Barritt Park on the Gulf of Mexico.
“The weather was fantastic, and the energy of the volunteers was nothing short of inspiring,” said Jim Foubister of Serve Florida, who organizes the event along with city Public Works staff. “New friendships were made, and old friendships renewed.”

That same month, Venice celebrated Florida City Government Week with, among other events, outreach to some of its youngest citizens. The city sponsored poster contests in two elementary schools with students drawing to the theme: “My City. I’m Part of It. I’m Proud of It.” The winners received framed certificates and pizza parties for their classes. The artwork was moved to City Hall, where visitors now can appreciate it in a permanent display.

Also as part of the week, the mayor, city manager, city clerk and 14 other city employees reached out to Venice’s younger citizens. The group visited Venice Elementary to read to students in kindergarten through second grade. Jack Chappa, communications manager at the Venice Police Department, read books to ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) students in Spanish. The kids, in turn, made him a large “gracias” posterboard, which included cutouts of their hands.

Some employees brought their favorite children’s books to read. Other books were pulled by staff in the school media center. Children were delighted to hear stories about law enforcement, fire safety and airports, since the city operates one.

The students hung on the readers’ every word, and it was hard to tell who was having more fun. “It was truly our pleasure to host our partners, and we look forward to this continued practice in the future,” Venice Elementary Principal Kirk Hutchinson said. “It was a great experience.”

The City of Venice has been designated a “Bicycle Friendly Community,” having achieved silver status through the League of American Bicyclists. City leaders recognize that cycling is one of the best ways for people to achieve good health and fitness as well as to bring people outside in the temperate Southwest Florida weather.

To engage its residents, the city has held a monthly bicycle ride every second Wednesday since 2016. Led by Bicycle/Pedestrian Coordinator Darlene Culpepper, the fun, casual six-mile ride on the Venice Island Loop starts at City Hall and goes around the island of Venice. Open to the public, the ride is for all ages and skill levels.

Riding a bicycle in an ongoing group provides motivation and accountability, pushes individuals to improve their skills and builds confidence. The bike ride program has seen dozens of riders take to the streets, learning more about bicycle safety and best practices while taking in the sights of this unique city on the gulf. A brief safety discussion is held prior to each monthly ride.

The ride has proven so popular that it’s been expanded. Culpepper partnered with City Historical Resources staff at the Venice Museum & Archives to design a historic tour by bicycle. The group held its first one in March 2018, with about 65 attending. The group covered four points of interest while riding about five miles. After requests to continue the historic bike tour, the event has become a staple in the community.

To promote cycling in Venice, the city has a cycling page on its website, venicegov.com, that provides bike trail maps and bicycle laws and safety information.

With these various events for residents of all ages, the City of Venice recognizes that people are its most valuable asset. The city will continue to plan events based on the premise that a city thrives when all of its citizens are engaged.

Lorraine Anderson is the public information officer for the City of Venice. QC
Talking with residents about Home Rule might sound challenging. Just as local decision-making itself is highly unique to your community, so is your approach to having that discussion.

Here are three stories of recent success. Find what inspires you to help educate and engage your local constituents in the fight to protect and promote Home Rule.

**FLC PRESIDENT SETS THE STAGE**

“How many of you know what Home Rule is?” Bartow Mayor Leo E. Longworth asked the crowd. Two or three hands hesitantly were raised. This response was what he had prepared for. When Longworth became president of the Florida League of Cities, he had a very specific idea: Build on the momentum of an engaged membership to better educate everyday residents on Home Rule.

“There are more than 20 million residents in Florida,” Longworth said. “If we could get even 1 percent of them engaged, that would be 200,000 more people fighting for local self-government. Imagine what we could accomplish.”

His plan was simple. Define Home Rule in simple terms, provide local examples to illustrate the concept and tailor the language city officials use when talking with residents so it feels personal.

Longworth challenged his colleagues. “Get out and talk about Home Rule,” he said. “Connect with civic groups, your local chamber. … We will give you the resources.” And then he set himself as the example.

Following his installation as president in August 2018, Longworth visited with over a dozen local groups in the greater Bartow region, reaching nearly 500 residents.

Longworth leads each audience through the simple definitions and affirms the adage that government closest to the people governs best. He gives the audience examples of recent local government solutions, implemented in direct response to a local issue or need. Then, he shifts and tells his audience that the ability to decide locally is under attack.

The state Legislature has repeatedly proposed bills that undermine the ability of cities to solve problems locally. In the last two years, there have been 141 attacks on Home Rule, and more are filed this legislative session.

“The Legislature thinks one-size-fits-all solutions are what we need, but Bartow is not the same as Tampa or Cocoa Beach,” Longworth said. “They do not know what we want or what we need ... so we must stand together and tell them. We live local, so we should decide local.”

When Longworth ends his speech, he asks his introductory question again: “How many of you know what Home Rule is?” This time, all the hands in the room go up. And when he asks how many are willing to take a stand, the only question in the room is, “Where do I sign up?”

**SPACE COAST USES LEGISLATIVE DELEGATES MEETING**

In mid-January, the Brevard County Legislative Delegation met in the City of Palm Bay Council Chambers. Delegation meetings are usually the best opportunity for residents to meet with their state elected officials all at once and at home. The leaders of the Space Coast League of Cities were counting on just that.

Satellite Beach Vice Mayor Dominick Montanero stood at the main entrance distributing cards explaining We Live Local to all who entered. Cocoa Beach Mayor and Space Coast League President Mike Miller included Home Rule in his comments to the delegation. He reminded nearly 200 attendees that Sen. Debbie Mayfield was the recent recipient of the Florida League of Cities Defender of Home Rule award.
Indialantic Deputy Mayor Stu Glass used the opportunity to connect one-on-one with audience members, including Nancy Peltonen, president and CEO of the Greater Palm Bay Chamber of Commerce. “I want people in the community to talk to other people in the community about local decision-making so they, too, can hold our legislators accountable,” Glass said. “The cards the League developed are a great conversation starter. The localness of it is an easy connection to make with business owners and advocates.”

Following the delegation meeting, Glass and others met directly with Peltonen to discuss the local impact of bills that would preempt local business regulation, including HB 3 filed this year. A partnership to protect local businesses and local decision-making was born.

“The educational materials helped us, as local officials, convert an abstract concept into reality,” Glass said. “They help us show our residents and business owners how Home Rule actually impacts us all.”

The connection made from a simple handout, reinforced by a formal presentation and followed up with a personal conversation, made a difference. Peltonen was the next speaker for the Space Coast League of Cities. The We Live Local cards can be found at her chamber office, as well as sitting on check-out counters and in waiting rooms across multiple businesses along the Space Coast.

**SUNCOAST HOSTS FORUM WITH COLLEGE**

In early February, the Suncoast League of Cities, inspired by the We Live Local campaign to educate the public about local decision-making, partnered with the St. Petersburg College to host a Home Rule forum. Students, members of the public and local officials joined for a history lesson on Home Rule and an opportunity to ask questions about how it affects us at the individual level.

Former Tampa Councilman Scott Paine, professor and FLC University leadership director, served as the facilitator and began the forum with a simple parallel about ice cream.

“When it comes to ice cream, the decision about which flavor to consume should be between the consumer and the merchant. That’s about as close as one can get,” Paine said. He then asked the audience to imagine someone else telling you that you could not have that particular flavor or that only vanilla was allowed.

Paine continued with a second parallel about power tools and noisy neighbors. “When the exercise of individual liberty collides with the liberty of others, we may be able to work things out, as neighbors, or we may need an authority to resolve the dispute,” he said. “That authority, if needed, should be close by ... say, as close as city hall.”

In this way, those people who are most affected by the decision can easily participate in the decision-making process. “What we don’t need is for that decision to be made hundreds of miles away,” Paine said. “Nor do we need it imposed uniformly, like in the ice cream example.”

Immediately next on the evening’s agenda was the League’s “History of Home Rule” video. When the lights lifted at the end of the 5-minute film, the directive left in the air was to join the fight. This directive was perfect timing for a discussion on bills that were before the Legislature and the local impact of each.

The panelists described potential measures including ones addressing scooters and short-term rentals. The panel consisted of Dunedin Commissioner and Suncoast League President Heather Gracy, St. Pete Beach Mayor Alan Johnson, South Pasadena Mayor Max Elson, Seminole City Manager Ann Toney-Deal and Florida League of Cities Legislative Director Scott Dudley.

Paine concluded the evening with this reminder: “Our lives are local. If we don’t like something about where we live, we are empowered to do something about it.”

Seminole Mayor Leslie Waters, who spearheaded the event, was thrilled with the response. “Home Rule is a hard sell only because people do not know what it is. Our goal was to host an event for the community that really explained what Home Rule is and why the public should get involved,” Waters said. “By partnering with a local college, we were really successful in connecting with our audience.”

When asked what was next, she replied, “The chamber. If they [the legislators] can tell us how to run our cities, next they are going to tell you how to run your businesses.”

Holly McPhail is the communications coordinator at the Florida League of Cities. QC

**WAYS TO PROMOTE HOME RULE**

The Florida League of Cities has multiple resources available. From sample speeches and handouts to infographics and videos, take advantage of the ready-made content to help reinforce your message. Go to floridaleagueofcities.com/WeLiveLocal.

Other ideas to promote Home Rule include:

- Use our Checklist for Success on the We Live Local web page.
- Challenge elected officials to become Home Rule heroes.
- Incorporate Home Rule into your citizens’ academy curriculum.
- Encourage residents to sign up to learn more and take action at welivelocalfl.com.
The Florida League of Cities Federal Action Strike Team (FAST) had its largest-ever delegation of city officials who traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with members of Florida's congressional delegation and advocate for key federal issues affecting cities. Forty municipal officials representing all regions of the state participated in the February 2019 FAST Fly-In.

“This was the largest FAST Fly-in group to date,” said Leo E. Longworth, Florida League of Cities president and Bartow mayor. “Each participant brought a unique perspective to our meetings, which helped our congressional delegation better understand the local impacts of the issues we discussed. I was proud to stand beside my fellow municipal officials and advocate for Florida cities with a unified voice. We really appreciate the delegation meeting with us, and we look forward to working with them this year.”

During their time in our nation’s capital, local leaders focused their advocacy efforts on discussing key priority issues including infrastructure funding, water quality and water supply, reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program and the federal preemption of small cell infrastructure deployment.

In response to Florida’s water quality challenges last year with red tide and blue-green algal blooms, attendees stressed the importance of working together with federal, state and local partners. Florida cities commend the efforts of Florida’s congressional delegation to address this critical issue.

The group also discussed the issue of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act for municipal websites, an issue that is affecting an increasingly larger number of Florida municipalities. FAST members advocated for the U.S. Department of Justice to establish a clear standard to make websites ADA-compliant and ultimately decrease the costly litigation that municipalities, businesses and other stakeholders are facing.

“The FAST trip is our opportunity to meet with members of Florida’s congressional delegation and discuss pressing issues that require federal attention,” said Willie Shaw, FAST chair and Sarasota commissioner. “We have a responsibility to work together at the local, state and federal levels to find bipartisan solutions that improve our quality of life. When we work together, our residents benefit and our communities thrive.”

The group met with 23 members of Florida’s congressional delegation, including Sen. Marco Rubio. FAST members also attended a briefing at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs where they spoke with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Office of Rural Development, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Allison Payne is the manager of advocacy programs and federal affairs at the Florida League of Cities. Email apayne@flcities.com for more information on the FAST Fly-Ins.
As we enter the midway point of the legislative session, it is more important than ever that city officials remain vigilant. City officials proved last year that advocacy works when we communicate to legislators with a unified voice. Here are some tips to stay engaged.

DON'T GET COMPLACENT.
Don’t assume your legislator(s) know your position on an issue. Don’t assume others are advocating so you don’t need to. Stay in touch with legislators and their legislative staff, and remind them of your position. Provide specifics on how legislation affects your city. What will it cost? How will it affect your citizens? Ask for what you want.

BE RESPONSIVE.
As we approach the last few weeks, the pace of session increases. House and Senate bills will move more rapidly, amendments will be offered, and the Florida League of Cities is here to keep you informed on what you need to know. When you receive a legislative alert, communicate with your legislator as soon as possible. Keep the FLC informed on your communications with legislators. What are their positions on the bills? How do they plan to vote? What are their concerns, if any? Your relationship with your legislators is vital to driving home your position.

USE THE FLC AS A RESOURCE.
Participate in the FLC Monday morning calls to hear directly from the lobbying team on what’s expected that week. They are held at 9:00 a.m. each Monday during session. To participate, call (888) 585-9008. When prompted, give the conference room number: 301-563-714.

Also, keep a lookout every Friday for the On Tap at the Cap summary. On Tap at the Cap provides updates via email on bill hearings at the Capitol.

If you are unsure about an issue, contact the FLC legislative team to get more information or learn how a legislator voted. Use the advocacy tools on the website to access issue briefs and talking points, find bill summaries and communicate with legislators.

BUILD SUPPORT FOR YOUR POSITION.
Use your role as a municipal leader to keep your citizens informed on how decisions in Tallahassee could affect your community back home. Participate in local chamber of commerce events or meetings of citizens groups. Speak about the importance of local decision-making. Talk about specific legislation being considered.

DON'T GIVE UP.
Stay focused until sine die and the legislative session officially concludes. You are an essential part of the League’s legislative success, and you are all champions of Florida's cities.

Visit floridaleagueofcities.com/advocacy to read about the League’s advocacy program and the 2019 legislative session. You’ll find legislative bill summaries, issue briefs, On Tap at the Cap and more.

Allison Payne is manager of advocacy programs and federal affairs for the Florida League of Cities. If you have any questions, contact her at apayne@flcities.com.
Intergovernmental Cooperation
Working as allies to improve the Sunshine State

by Beth Rawlins
Business Watch

Cooperation among all levels of government is the magic ingredient that makes our economy and communities strong. As an example, let’s look at transportation. You likely leave your home on a city street and then connect to a county road, state highway or federal interstate to get to the nearest airport. Every level of government works together to design a seamless system to get you where you need to go.

The relationship between local and state government is especially important when dealing with the challenges of our changing economy. While the state continues to support a business-friendly environment with tools such as Enterprise Florida, cities break new ground with business incubators and development centers. Cities are the center of economic activity in our state, the places that attract industry and generate jobs, but they need the support of the state to allow free enterprise to flourish.

Examples of city-state cooperation are myriad; however, chaos often ensues when the state dictates to cities. Not all chaos is bad. Just remember your favorite Jackson Pollock painting or the beautiful scribblings of children using crayons. But when the state violates the important governing principle of Home Rule and imposes one-size-fits-all regulation on Florida’s cities, our business world falls apart.

The companies that are members of Business Watch thrive by customizing solutions for the individual needs of each of Florida’s cities. We understand that solutions that work for big cities might harm small towns. We know conditions and needs are different in urban, suburban and rural communities. Tailoring solutions to unique circumstances are the beating heart of our business model.

Often, attempts at standardization fall flat, forcing local governments to rewrite or reexamine their regulations and putting our members’ contracts at risk. At the very least, it slows down the sales cycle, and that can be devastating to businesses.

City and state government can become allies through sincere communication and respectful dialogue designed to foster cooperation. We can work together to improve infrastructure, expand transportation options, promote urban infill and support our economic drivers. Together, we can craft creative solutions that work for the individual cities of our diverse state.

The fact is that each level of government has vastly different roles and services that they must deliver to their taxpayers and citizens. This diversity offers us a continuous opportunity to redefine intergovernmental relations and the power structure that exists between cities and the state. To be successful, we all need a continuous dose of the magic ingredient: cooperation.

Beth Rawlins is president of Business Watch.
FLC University makes building your knowledge easy.

ONLINE LEARNING
The FLC University offers the following live and on-demand learning events from the convenience of your desk or mobile device. These courses are free to League members.

Upcoming Live Events
» April 11 – Sunshine and Shade: Florida Public Meetings Law and Closed-Door Exceptions
» May 14 – Post Legislative Session Update
» May 23 – Hot Topics in Social Media: Emergency Communications Before, During & After an Event

On-Demand Events
» Hot Topics in Social Media: Live Streaming in 2019
» Civility: Disagreeing Without Being Disagreeable
» That’s a WRAP: Florida’s Program to Boost Plastic Film Recycling
» Using Technology to Enhance Citizen Communication
» Attorney for Whom? Attorney/Client Privilege in Municipal Government
» ADA Compliant Websites

SOCIAL MEDIA TRAINING DAY WORKSHOPS
Designed for elected officials and municipal employees alike, this free class will cover the basics of municipal social media use before diving into more advanced management.

Pick from the following dates and locations:
» April 30 – Daytona Beach
» May 8 – Fort Walton Beach

REGIONAL SUMMITS: MEDICAL MARIJUANA IN FLORIDA: PAST, PRESIDENT FUTURE
The medical marijuana industry in Florida has undergone dramatic changes in the last four years. Join us for a daylong learning opportunity to explore its history, peek at what we think the future holds and truly understand what options cities have today to regulate medical marijuana. Part classroom instruction, part facility tour, attendees will learn the differences between cultivation, processing and distribution facilities, plus discuss the local impact and safety concerns of each. Attendees will also have a candid question-and-answer session with Christian Bax, former director of the Department of Health’s Office of Medical Marijuana.

Pick from four dates and locations:
» April 26 – Palmetto
» May 3 – Homestead
» May 10 – Winter Garden
» May 17 – Tallahassee

TIME: 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
WHO: Elected officials, municipal administrators, police chiefs and public safety personnel are encouraged to attend this exclusive opportunity. Seating is very limited for each location, so secure your spot today.
COST: $60 member exclusive rate (includes lunch, transportation to and from facility plus facility tour; alternate transportation not permitted)

TO REGISTER FOR OR ACCESS FLC UNIVERSITY TRAINING
To register for upcoming live events, access on-demand training or learn more about the educational opportunities offered by the League, visit flcuniversity.com. If you have questions, contact Shwanda Barnette at university@flcities.com or (407) 367-4024.
Florida’s 1,350 miles of coastline face an enemy that is slow-moving but steady and perhaps irreversible: sea level rise.

“Some of the more severe impacts like permanent inundation [flooding] may be a few decades away, so people may not feel it’s necessary to start planning,” said Crystal Goodison, associate director and associate scholar at the GeoPlan Center, University of Florida. “However, other impacts, like nuisance flooding [during high tides] are happening now and will only get worse with additional sea level rise. And it is difficult to know how much more rapidly the sea level might rise.” The GeoPlan Center is a geographic information systems research and teaching center that specializes in environmental and urban planning projects for local governments and others.
In 2014, global sea level had risen 2.6 inches above the average in 1993, according to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Florida is particularly at risk because the state is so flat. Every time the GeoPlan Center revisits projects and does remodeling, sea level rise increases. “We have our best estimate, which is one to three feet by the end of the century,” Goodison said.

Before that time, there will be nuisance flooding of streets and properties. “It’s important for communities to start the conversation now so they can be ready to take on the process as it evolves,” Goodison said. Nuisance flooding is 300 percent to 900 percent more frequent in U.S. coastal communities than merely 50 years ago, NOAA says. However, “[m]ore than half of the damages to coastal property are estimated to be avoidable through well-timed adaptation measures,” according to the National Climate Assessment 2018 report from the U.S. Global Change Research Program.

Many smaller cities don’t have the staff or resources needed, but collaborations and information from a variety of sources help cities prepare their slingshots for this Goliath of a problem. Gov. Ron DeSantis has created an Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection to help prepare coastal communities and habitats for impacts from sea level rise by providing funding, technical assistance and coordination among state, regional and local entities.

The “Peril of Flood” law, passed in 2015, requires local comprehensive plans to include development and redevelopment strategies to reduce the flood risk in coastal areas that results from “high-tide events, storm surge, flash floods, stormwater runoff, and the related impacts of sea-level rise.” When that law was passed, local governments began to examine how to develop those strategies.

**STEPS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE**

So what should Florida cities do? “The important thing is for coastal cities and communities to have a plan,” said Shawn Landry, director of the Water Institute, a research institute affiliated with the University of South Florida that addresses local and global water challenges. “What are they going to do when a large chunk of coastal real estate is underwater or is at a greater risk of storm surge? They have to have a plan to deal with it.”

**RESOURCES**

- **Florida Resilient Coastlines Program** in the Department of Environmental Protection. [floridaep.gov/fco](http://floridaep.gov/fco). It facilitates collaboration and offers Community Planning Technical Assistance and Resilience Planning Grants to communities impacted by climate change, particularly rising sea levels. It offers an *Adaptation Planning Guidebook* based on Florida requirements.

- **The University of Florida Geo-Facilities Planning and Information Research Center** (GeoPlan Center, geoplan.ufl.edu) is a geographic information system research and teaching center that specializes in environmental and urban planning projects for local governments and others. A Sea Level Scenario Sketch Planning Tool helps identify transportation infrastructure vulnerable to flooding. Also, the Florida Geographic Data Library (FGDL.org) has mapping layers.

- **PerilOfFlood.net** is updated by Florida’s Regional Planning Councils and features information on coastal resiliency.

- **Resiliency Florida** helps communities adapt for the future impacts of weather including sea level rise. This organization of public and private partners promotes state and regional action plans to adapt to extreme weather and sea level rise, and it advocates for investment by the state and federal government in infrastructure and habitat to mitigate impacts and develop adaptation responses. resiliencyflorida.org.

- The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact was formed by four Southeast Florida counties to coordinate climate mitigation and adaptation activities across those counties and the 109 municipalities in the region. Currently, 35 cities in Southeast Florida have committed to the regional goals of the compact through the compact’s Mayors Pledge. The compact hosts an annual leadership summit for local leaders that will be held December 3–5, 2019, in Key West. The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Action Plan is available at [southeastfloradclimatecompact.org](http://southeastfloradclimatecompact.org).

- Several articles on sea level rise have been published in *Quality Cities* as part of the Partners in Municipal Research Program established by the *Florida League of Cities*’ Center for Municipal Research & Innovation. Visit [floridaleagueofcities.com](http://floridaleagueofcities.com), then search for “Research Article Journal” to access the following stories:
  - 2018: “Coastal Adaptation Planning, Understanding stakeholder priorities for improvements and timetables” by C.J. Reynolds and Frank Muller Karger, University of South Florida.
  - 2016: “Adapting to Rising Tides. Sea-level rise studied for City of St. Augustine” by Jerry Murphy, University of Florida Resilient Communities Initiative.

- On-demand learning is available from the FLC:
Throw a wide net. Include elected officials, planning, zoning, stormwater, public works, etc., the Florida Department of Environmental Protection urges in its Adaptation Planning Guidebook. (See list of resources, p. 31.)

Communities should conduct a vulnerability assessment, which will lead to adaptation strategies for your specific challenges, the DEP said. The last step is to determine how to implement strategies.

Prepare a community resilience plan. “Implementing the approved plan, and maintaining and updating the plan are keys to success,” the DEP said. “Coastal communities should continue to modify their plans to keep pace with the changing natural and built environments.”

“Adaptation and planning are big things to take on for a local government,” Goodison said. The DEP guidebook offers case studies and a framework for addressing adaptation at the local level so they don’t have to start from scratch.”

If your city is located along the coast, start planning for sea level rise now, added Jason Evans, facility director for the Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience at Stetson University and associate professor of environmental science and studies at Stetson.

CITIES JOIN FORCES

The most important step is having a conversation with your community, Goodison said. Keep in mind that neighboring communities might have risks that impact you, so it’s important to include those communities in your planning.

Here’s an overview of how some Florida cities are facing this challenge head-on:

booynton Beach recently joined the American Flood Coalition, previously known as the Seawall Coalition. The organization is “a nonpartisan coalition advocating for national solutions to flooding and sea level rise.”

Islamorada, Village of Islands and the South Florida Regional Planning Council recently held meetings to address sea level rise and readiness to reduce flood risk and redevelop following a flood. The SFRRPC will provide updates to Islamorada’s Comprehensive Plan.

Jacksonville is establishing a committee on sea level rise and said it

Several universities are participating in a three-year study to determine where a Southwest Florida area is vulnerable to sea level rise and to address vulnerabilities. The study is being conducted by Collier County and is addressing the impact of sea level rise on Everglades City, Marco Island and Naples. The study is conducted by Florida Gulf Coast University, the University of Florida, the University of Miami and the U.S. Geological Survey with a $1 million grant from the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (Deepwater Horizon settlement money through the federal RESTORE Act).

The study is examining sea level rise and storminess. “It’s one thing for a community to deal with nuisance flooding that will get worse as sea level goes up,” said Michael Savarese, professor of marine science at Florida Gulf Coast University. “It’s another to put a hurricane on top of sea level rise of different magnitudes. That’s when the serious impacts occur.” Savarese is the community engagement point person to distribute tools to leaders and oversee their use.

Researchers can show how government structures and infrastructure, as well as private businesses, are affected by sea level rise. The models have been developed, but they have to be customized for specific landscapes.

These models can be customized for cities but require some financial investment in building the database on which the models run, Savarese said. He has a $53,000 state grant from the Florida Resilient Coastlines Program, part of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, that will be used to start a vulnerability analysis for Sanibel.

Cedar Key has a historic preservation grant from the University of Florida Historic Preservation Program and is working on a full digital vulnerability flood assessment study for the historic district.

St. Augustine worked with the University of Florida Resilient Communities Initiative to conduct a study and publish a white paper that determined the city will have sea level rise from 0.25 to 6.67 feet in the next 15-85 years. The city partnered with Flagler College to conduct a workshop on sea level rise and future flooding in historic places. The need to educate residents was an emphasis of the workshop, which received a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Results of a recent survey on flooding will be presented at the Keeping History Above Water international conference, May 5-8, 2019, in St. Augustine. The conference will explore the impacts of sea level rise on historic coastal and river communities and cultural resources. The city has partnered with the University of Florida and others. (For more information, go to historyabovewater.org.)

Collecting information and developing tools are just the first steps in addressing the issue, Savarese emphasized. “Resilience requires that you act on some of that information,” he said. “Cities are probably the most likely advocates for doing mitigation and coming up with good carbon use plans and reducing the carbon footprint of a city.”

Editor’s note: The Florida League of Cities’ Center for Municipal Research & Innovation is available to link cities with researchers. For more information, contact Chris Holley at cholley@flcities.com or (850) 701-3014. Also, see an article about the CMRI’s work on p. 48.
will be a collaboration with nearby beach cities including Jacksonville Beach, Atlantic Beach and Neptune Beach. The beach mayors met recently to discuss sea level rise and its consequences. Neptune Beach is planning a June forum on the topic. Atlantic Beach is developing a coastal vulnerability assessment and adaptation plan using a $40,000 state grant from the DEP, through the Florida Resilient Coastlines Program.

Miami, Miami Beach and Miami-Dade County have partnered through the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities program. The partners plan to release the Greater Miami and the Beaches’ Resilience Strategy this summer.

Evans has worked with Satellite Beach and other cities on climate-change adaptation with support from Florida Sea Grant. Satellite Beach has developed a sustainability action plan. The city is relocating an older fire station due to predicted flood vulnerabilities. Its Sustainable Action Plan is available at satellitebeach.org/Residents-Visitors. Evans’ staff has performed free rapid assessments for cities and worked with regional planning councils.

Several city governments and seven counties recently agreed to form the Tampa Bay Regional Resiliency Coalition. The governments plan to address the region’s vulnerability to climate change including sea level rise. (For information on what other cities are doing, see story, 32.)

Joy Dickinson is an assistant editor at the Florida League of Cities.

Nuisance flooding is 300 percent to 900 percent more frequent in U.S. coastal communities than merely 50 years ago.
Just as governmental services evolve over time based upon population changes, service delivery issues and other factors, a city charter needs periodic reviews so that it is truly a reflection of the population and government being served.

In Florida, all municipalities have a governing document called the charter, and under the state’s Home Rule powers, it’s the residents of each city who vote to adopt, amend or dissolve it.

Derived from the Latin word for contract, charters function today as a social contract between citizens and the officials whom they elect to represent them and to provide self-governance.

The charter outlines the organizational structure of the city to ensure it meets the city’s needs.

Charters are broad frameworks, of course, and not the best document in which to include specifics that are better placed in ordinances and administrative codes. Even broad frameworks, however, need to keep pace with changes in state and federal laws and other factors. In a high-growth state like Florida, the 10-year to 20-year charter review period is common among municipalities. Florida cities that have recently undergone this process include Crestview, Gainesville and North Port.

Some cities have built-in charter review timelines, such as every decade or every 20 years. Other cities leave that timing to the discretion of the council or commission, or they have provisions that allow for a charter review to be activated by petition.

In non-election years, cities may choose to convene a charter review committee so that the timing will align with an election year in the event amendments are necessary. If the timing of amendments doesn’t line up with an election year, a city may choose to hold a special election for its amendments.

WHERE TO START

To begin a charter review process, many cities have adopted a procedure in their administrative codes or through an ordinance that establishes the details. It usually includes the timing of the committee and its work, the appointment of the committee members and their procedures for noticing their work, such as compliance with public meeting laws and sharing minutes on the city website. It also outlines how the recommendations of the committee will be considered.

Each city determines through its Home Rule powers whether it will place any recommended changes onto the ballot or have the council make that determination after the committee concludes its work. Some charter review committees have no changes to recommend because the charter is already up to date.

As the committee begins its work, it is common to start with a review of the entire charter with the city attorney and to then break the charter into its articles (charter sections) for individual discussion, comparison and possible revision. The citizen-based committee might determine that one or more articles don’t need review at this time, which would limit the committee’s scope of work.

Under Florida’s open meeting laws, each public meeting includes a review and adoption of minutes from the prior meeting as well as an opportunity for the public to be heard. As the articles are reviewed, comparisons might be made to peer city charters topically or might be used to help the committee understand alternatives.
CITIZEN-BASED POWER
FROM TAMMANY HALL TO
As the right way to establish a proper
review and consideration of ballot mea-
ments, if each member appoints
can often manage without a facilitator.
Use peer reviews when there is a lack of institutional history.
Some cities find that no current staff have been through a charter review when it has been 20 or more years since the last review. Other than minutes from past reviews, there may be a lack of institutional knowledge and history about the city’s reasons, rationale and justifications on the current charter. This is when peer reviews with just a few other cities can be helpful so that a city isn’t starting from scratch. The Municipal Code Corporation’s charter library is helpful with those comparisons.

Keep it simple.
Remember that the charter is your framework, not your laws. As details are proposed, have your chairperson keep a tight rein on what is appropriate for the committee to discuss and research (with staff) and what should be referred to the attorney for consideration as ordinance(s).

Keep the committee size manageable.
Charter review committees with more than 15 members can be tough. The larger a committee, the harder it is to find dates for the meetings and to hold effective sessions. Ideally, for a five-person city council/commission, if each member appoints two representatives and the mayor appoints three, you’ll have an 11-member committee. This size works well together. It can also be helpful to have an alternate appointed in the event someone must resign from the committee.

Robert E. (Bob) Lee, DPA, is an assistant professor at Florida Gulf Coast University in the Department of Public Administration. He had a 26-year career in city management serving in Naples, Gulfport, Lauderdale and Bellevue, Pa. QC

RESOURCES
National Civic League: Model City Charter
(Eighth edition) and Guide for Charter Commissions. ncl.org. Please note: The questions and processes outlined in the model are very helpful; however, do not use their actual charter language as it doesn’t conform to Florida law.
Municipal Code Corporation’s charter library. Many cities have their codified charters listed here: library.municode.com/fl.

FROM TAMMANY HALL TO
CITIZEN-BASED POWER
Historically, the idea of charters as the right way to establish a proper balance of power between the council, the mayor (if applicable) and the staff is well-documented.

In the 1890s, Teddy Roosevelt helped dismantle New York City’s political “machine” called Tammany Hall through a national civic organization whose purpose was encouraging charter reforms to reign in corruption, nepotism and other political wrongdoings. The future president was a police commissioner and actively involved in the city government at the time.

Citizens recognized and embraced that the document for the level of government closest to them could be changed only by them—local decisions, locally made. They knew that citizen-based power made the most substantial difference in how their municipalities would and should represent them and govern.

That fledgeling civic organization helped to birth two prominent associations: the National League of Cities and the National Civic League. Both associations were critically important to the Reform Era (1880s to 1920s) and its merit-based, ethically focused revisions in federal, state and local government.

Governments evolve as their communities, citizens and services evolve, and an effective charter must reflect the characteristics, goals and vision of its citizens.

Lynn Tipton is director of FLC University for the Florida League of Cities. QC

Staff is often asked to bring back research-related information to the committee. For example, changing the size of the city council from five seats to seven would require additional funding for the elected officials, as well as have other budgetary impacts, so staff would determine that cost. The attorney might also be asked to bring back sample ballot language for a proposed change so the committee members can better understand how voters would view and take action on any changes. This review is usually several months, which varies greatly depending upon the committee’s availability.

Should any recommendations come from the committee to the council/commission, then the process begins for review and consideration of ballot measures by the council.

by Robert E. Lee
Florida Gulf Coast University

As a public administration academic and retired city manager, I have managed many charter reviews and assisted with them as a facilitator. The following are offered as best practices:

Use a facilitator when a substantial review is planned.
If your city is looking at major revisions to its charter, an external facilitator can be the best choice. Bring in an experienced facilitator to take the committee through the lengthy and detailed process, which will take the pressure off city staff. If the charter review process is minimal, the city attorney and staff can often manage without a facilitator.

Keep it simple.
Remember that the charter is your framework, not your laws. As details are proposed, have your chairperson keep a tight rein on what is appropriate for the committee to discuss and research (with staff) and what should be referred to the attorney for consideration as ordinance(s).

Keep the committee size manageable.
Charter review committees with more than 15 members can be tough. The larger a committee, the harder it is to find dates for the meetings and to hold effective sessions. Ideally, for a five-person city council/commission, if each member appoints two representatives and the mayor appoints three, you’ll have an 11-member committee. This size works well together. It can also be helpful to have an alternate appointed in the event someone must resign from the committee.

Robert E. (Bob) Lee, DPA, is an assistant professor at Florida Gulf Coast University in the Department of Public Administration. He had a 26-year career in city management serving in Naples, Gulfport, Lauderdale and Bellevue, Pa. QC

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Municipal Code Corporation’s charter library. Many cities have their codified charters listed here: library.municode.com/fl.
For traveling across Florida, interstates may be the fastest route, but Florida’s long-distance trails provide a scenic and healthier alternative. Trails attract visitors from other states and countries, providing an economic boost to communities across the Sunshine State.

Hiking, bicycling, equestrian, paddling and multi-use trails are part of the interconnected Florida Greenways and Trails System. This system encompasses more than 10,000 miles of existing and proposed land trails and 4,000 miles of designated paddling trails.

The trail system includes the 1,300-mile Florida National Scenic Trail, which runs from Big Cypress Swamp to Fort Pickens near Pensacola. The trail is primarily used by hikers. The trail system also includes the 1,515-mile Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail traversing the entire coast of Florida from Pensacola to Key West to Fernandina Beach. Both of these long-distance trails can take three to four months to complete in one trip, but many people tackle them in segments over several years. Many describe a journey on these trails as life changing.

“The trail is amazing,” said Jodi Eller, the first woman to complete the Circumnavigational Trail. “It goes through so many different ecosystems. How the beaches change along the trail is just incredible,” Eller said. “The trail made me a stronger paddler, and it also redefined who I am in a way, bringing me back to the essence of being human. It’s a powerful experience to go through.”

Thousands of outdoor enthusiasts use the Circumnavigational Trail and Florida Trail for day trips and weekend outings each year. For example, surveys show that about 365,000 people a year hike sections of the Florida National Scenic Trail. This is good for the health of Florida citizens and visitors because the American Heart Association estimates that for every dollar spent on walking paths and programs, about three dollars in medical expenses can be saved.
To boost trail use as a healthy alternative, the Florida Park Service has launched the Park Fit program as an alternative to traditional gyms. The Greenways and Trails System is coordinated by Florida’s Office of Greenways and Trails – an important component of the state Department of Environmental Protection’s Florida State Parks system – with other agencies, local governments and nonprofit groups.

Long-distance paved multi-use trails for cyclists are being planned and built throughout Florida. Projects include the 250-mile Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail from St. Petersburg to Titusville; the 260-mile St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop; the Florida portion of the East Coast Greenway that runs from Maine to Key West; the Gulf Coast Trail in Southwest Florida; the Capital City to Sea Trails in the Big Bend; and the Great Northwest Coastal Trail along the Panhandle coast. Florida is quickly becoming a national and international cycling destination.

Paved trails that are separate from roadways are attractive due to their scenic appeal and higher safety levels. The 90-mile Florida Keys Overseas Heritage Trail attracts more than a million visitors per year, making it the third most visited state park unit in Florida. The most visited state park in Florida is the 110-mile Cross Florida Greenway, which provides trails and recreational opportunities for hikers, cyclists, equestrians and paddlers. More than 2.6 million people visited the Cross Florida Greenway last year.

Funding for building paved multi-use trails is manifold. The Florida Department of Transportation funnels federal alternative transportation money for trail construction. In addition, the state-funded Shared-Use Nonmotorized Trail Program allocates $25 million annually for constructing paved multi-use trails identified as priority corridors.

Local governments are also instrumental in creating new trails and trail amenities. Clermont is building a paved loop trail through its downtown that will connect to the South Lake Trail and Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail. It is known as the Clermont Legacy Loop. The city is also building the Meet Us in the Middle Trailhead and Gateway with tech-based kiosks, seating and more at the halfway point of the Florida Coast-to-Coast Trail.

Inverness has embraced bicycle tourism as an economic driver. It raised $14 million to build a highly visual gateway from the 46-mile Withlacoochee State Trail to its downtown. Projects include redesigning trailside parks, turning an abandoned warehouse along the trail into a farmer’s market and events center, and transforming an abandoned railroad depot into a trail facility with amenities. Construction and renovations are underway with a major phase to be completed by October.

The efforts of Clermont and Inverness are just two examples of how communities throughout Florida are contributing to the state’s growing trail system, improving the quality of life for residents and visitors.

Doug Alderson is the assistant bureau chief of the Office of Greenways and Trails. He is also the author of several award-winning Florida outdoor and travel books. For more information about the trails program, contact him at Doug.Alderson@FloridaDEP.gov.

**CITIES NEAR TRAILS REAP BENEFITS**

Trails are a distinctive resource for nearby municipalities, which can be vibrant places where hikers, bicyclists, equestrians or paddlers enjoy a meal, stock up on supplies, spend the night, find information, or simply enjoy the heritage and charm of the community. When cities enhance the traveling experience for trail users, trail users can, in turn, support a city’s economy.

To recognize these communities, the Office of Greenways and Trails developed the Florida Trail Town program in 2018, inspired by the successful trail town programs of states such as Pennsylvania and Kentucky. Interested communities conduct a self-assessment to gauge their strengths and weaknesses in relation to nearby trails and trail users and then submit an application. Trail Town candidates are considered for approval by the legislatively established Florida Greenways and Trails Council.

The first designated Florida Trail Town was Dunedin. Located along Florida’s west coast, Dunedin has long been a mecca for non-motorized paved trail users. Bicyclists, joggers, in-line skaters and those enjoying a leisurely stroll can access the city by way of the Pinellas Trail, which runs through the downtown area on an abandoned railroad corridor. The trail is credited with increasing business occupancy rates from 30 percent to 100 percent.

Since Dunedin was designated, Titusville, Clermont, Vilano Beach, Malabar, Palatka, Deltona, Inverness and Everglades City have received Florida Trail Town designations. Most of these Trail Towns are on major long-distance multi-use trails, and Titusville is likely the only city in Florida that features a bike shop inside its downtown visitor’s center. Everglades City is a hub for paddling trails, including the Florida Circumnavigational Saltwater Paddling Trail.

A goal of the Florida Trail Town program is to acknowledge successes with the hope that other communities will be inspired to follow suit. Research has shown that communities can benefit when they expand services to trail users. “In Florida, participating in outdoor recreation is a way of life,” said state parks director Eric Draper. “Trail Towns not only provide trail users with necessary goods and services, but also promote healthy lifestyles. It’s very exciting to see the Division of Recreation and Parks’ Trail Town program gaining such momentum.”

Successful Trail Towns have a common denominator: a champion, or champions, to support the Trail Town designation. This person could be a resident, local government official, a leader of a nonprofit organization or someone who fits a combination of these categories. The support of elected officials and the business community is essential.

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**GO TO:** Visit floridade.gov/parks/ogt to find Trail Town highlights and program information.
Insurance 101: Making the Right Decision

Tips for comparing policies

by Tom Conley
Florida League of Cities

We know discussing insurance and comparing policies is anything but exciting. As we approach budget season, you may find yourself trying to compare quotes from various insurance providers. Unfortunately, it does not simply come down to which one has the lowest price. “Price” is not the “final cost.” There are significant differences in policy forms from company to company. Even though you may publish a formal RFP, the responses you receive will never truly be apples to apples. With the information in this article, you will be armed with the knowledge to spot these differences, ask some good questions and be assured that you have done a good job in making the right decision.

EXAMINE INSURER’S ABILITY TO PAY.

When you purchase insurance, you are purchasing a promise to pay future claims. You want to select an insurer with the financial ability to pay when your future claims occur. You should request the following information: How long has the company been in business providing all lines of coverage? Demand a current audited financial statement. Don’t let a sales representative provide excuses why this can’t be provided.

Standard market insurance carriers are regulated, and their financial strength is closely monitored with ratings assigned to them (A, A-, B, etc.). Self-insured trusts, on the other hand, are not regulated, so it is incumbent on you to investigate the financial strength. Some will provide a copy of their financial statement, and some historically will not. It is highly likely that the only bids you receive will be from self-insured trusts.

CHECK WITH THEIR INSURED CUSTOMERS.

Ask for a current list of insured cities, counties and districts, and check with some of them regarding satisfaction with the service and coverage. You also may want to check with some who have left the program to find out about their experiences.
LOOK AT FINANCIAL RATINGS OR REINSURANCE PROVIDER.

Find out from whom the insurer purchases insurance. This item is called reinsurance or excess insurance. Find out the financial ratings of those companies. Are they known, legitimate companies or highly rated ones that simply “front” for other low-rated carriers?

Reinsurance is akin to marriage. The companies get to know each other and how they operate, and they usually work together on a long-term basis. If the carriers seem to change often, or levels of retention are increasing or otherwise changing, this fact is worth investigating.

FOCUS ON MAJOR POLICY DESIGN.

Now, on to issues to look for that vary from policy to policy. You may encounter an insurance sales representative who dwells on minor policy differences to make his or her company’s offer seem superior.

With all the various supplemental coverage enhancements today, there are bound to be areas where one policy is a little better here while another is a little better there. It is a wiser use of your time to focus on the big picture: the major policy design.

General liability and public officials liability insurance policies differ the most from carrier to carrier. The biggest difference is whether your policy is “claims-made” or “occurrence.”

In our opinion, you want to have occurrence liability coverage. Should you ever decide to switch carriers, an occurrence policy will continue to provide coverage if a claim arises later from an event that occurred during the time you were covered. A claims-made policy will not do this. Coverage ends when you switch carriers. A claim that shows up later will have no coverage. You can purchase additional coverage for this exposure, but it typically costs as much as two years of additional premiums. If you are in the position of considering a claims-made policy, be aware of this extra cost that you eventually may incur.

Another major difference from policy to policy is annual aggregates. A policy may cover you for $1 million. But if it has aggregates, you are getting that amount of coverage only for the year, not for each claim. Therefore, your coverage for the year might get used up by one claim early in the year, which leaves you with very little or no coverage for the remainder of the year. Stay away from these!

In the area of defense costs, some policies include these in the limit of coverage. This cost can seriously erode the amount the policy has left to ultimately pay your claim. If you have a long, drawn-out legal battle, the defense costs can quickly add up, which leaves you with few remaining funds to pay your claim. Stay away from policies that include defense costs “inside” your limits of coverage!

CHECK OUT THE DEDUCTIBLES.

Deductibles can vary considerably from policy to policy. Are deductibles included in a quote when you did not ask for them in your RFP? You must look closely for deductibles placed where you do not currently have them or want them, or deductibles that are higher than you have or want.

Some companies apply the deductible to “claims expense” and legal fees. This action means you will have a deductible to pay for every claim, even on claims that close with no claim payment. Try to avoid these vague deductibles, and stick with a company that charges the deductible only if a claim is awarded. Deductibles for “named storm” damage can vary greatly, so pay close attention to that area as well. Some carriers require a minimum deductible (usually substantially larger than your regular deductible) for “named storm” coverage. Carriers can vary considerably as to how they handle the covering of “property in the open,” so this issue warrants a close look. The same goes for how “non-monetary” claims are handled.

EXAMINE WORKERS’ COMPENSATION CREDITS.

If you have requested quotes for workers’ compensation, watch for credits that may be included that you may not currently receive or qualify for, such as the credits for a drug-free workplace and for safety programs. These credits are sometimes thrown in to gain a pricing advantage where they are not appropriate. In addition, payroll may be inappropriately moved from higher cost employee class codes into lower cost ones to gain pricing advantage.

LOOK AT GUARANTEES.

Two-year rate guarantees have become popular in recent years. Give due consideration as to whether these guarantees benefit you or just benefit the salesperson. It sounds like a good idea on the surface, but often it’s simply a sales tool designed to guarantee a customer stays on the books.

And understand that your premiums are not what is guaranteed not to increase. This is a “rate” guarantee, not a “premium” guarantee. These offers are generally made when the business cycle has rates falling year after year. Getting yourself out of one of these deals is costly and difficult. We’ve seen a lot of cities get pushed into this situation without realizing what they signed up for.

CONSIDER VALUE-ADDED SERVICES AND COVERAGE.

Finally, take the time to inquire about value-added services such as disaster recovery assistance, loss prevention training, asset valuations, safety grant programs, cyber liability protection and human resource/employment practices legal assistance and training.

Some carriers provide additional valuable coverage, such as for wind-driven rain damage and coverage for property damage mitigation costs with no deductible. Extra benefits like these really count.

Remember, price is not the only issue. A policy that looks cheaper on the surface may reveal major inferiorities upon closer inspection. If you take the time to dig a little deeper and keep these points in mind, you can make the daunting task of comparing insurance policies a lot easier. And, you can feel comfortable that you gave the decision the proper attention.

Tom Conley is an account executive serving the North Florida region for the Florida Municipal Insurance Trust. The Florida League of Cities is the administrator of the Florida Municipal Insurance Trust. For more information on the FMIT, contact Clay Austin, director of trust services, at caustin@flcites.com. QC
Media Relations for Municipal Officials
Tips for building effective working relationships with reporters

by Brittni Johnsen
Florida League of Cities

It’s essential for municipal officials to work with their local media outlets. To effectively work with members of the news media, however, you first have to build relationships with them. These relationships are not as scary as they might seem at first. Reporters should not be viewed as the enemy. In fact, they can help local leaders better serve their city, town or village. They can serve as the window to your community or the megaphone to your message when it comes to sharing important city news and information.

“Although there are many new ways to inform citizens, the media continues to be an important avenue for citizen education,” said Kevin Hogencamp, deputy city manager for the City of Atlantic Beach. Directing communications and media relations for the city are among Hogencamp's responsibilities. He has worked in local government for almost nine years, and he worked in the newspaper industry as a reporter, editor and publisher. Having been on both sides of the relationship, Hogencamp believes “effective media relations is among the many tools in local governments’ communications toolbox.”

It’s important to work with reporters, not against them.

Jeannie Roberts, communications coordinator for the City of Bradenton, believes that relationships with the media can be positive. Roberts, who also worked in the newspaper industry before
working for a municipality – first in Ohio and now in Florida – believes that “a good, solid, honest conversation right off the bat is a great beginning” to cultivating relationships with reporters.

**BEST PRACTICES**

Keep the following best practices in mind when interacting with reporters and other members of the news media.

**Be responsive and timely.** Always respond to a media inquiry, and try to do so as quickly and efficiently as possible. You’re trying to build a relationship, which is a two-way street. If the inquiry isn’t something that can be answered right away, at least acknowledge the call or email, suggested Roberts. She explained, “I just had a reporter say to me last week, ‘Thanks for letting me know when you get my email and that you’ll get back to me when you get the info. It helps me know it’s being taken care of, and I don’t have to wonder.'”

**Be helpful.** The fastest, most effective way to build a good relationship with reporters? Help them do their job. Simply make yourself accessible and resourceful. For example, offer resources on a recent decision your local government made. Fact sheets, handouts and easy-to-digest information pieces are always a good idea.

**Educate.** Never assume that members of the media comprehend the topic or issue at hand. It’s the responsibility of the local official to educate the public on municipal matters. So always try to help reporters understand the subject matter they’re inquiring about.

**Be accurate and transparent.** It’s imperative that local elected leaders be truthful and transparent, especially when communicating about city matters. Double-check or even triple-check to make sure that the information you’re providing is correct.

**Be prepared.** When reporters contact you, whether in person, over the phone or via email, it’s helpful to ask a few questions before speaking with them further. First, find out specifically what they’re wanting to discuss and what information is sought. Second, ask for their deadline. While you should generally welcome opportunities to interact with the media, never feel obligated to do so on the spot. Feel free to take time to gather your thoughts, draft a few talking points or check your information for accuracy. But always remember their deadline.

**A Q&A WITH THE EXPERTS**

1. **What, in your opinion, is one of the most important things for local elected officials to remember about the news and members of the media?**

   **JEANNE ROBERTS,** communications coordinator for the **City of Bradenton:** Remember, they have a job to do, and so do you. Part of your job as an elected official is to inform your constituents about things they want to know about. Let the media help you with that. There is no reason to fear that relationship.

   **KEVIN HOCENCAMP,** deputy city manager for the **City of Atlantic Beach:** Most crucial, I think, is to be keenly aware of the news media’s vital roles as watchdogs and as information-disseminators in a democratic society.

2. **Do you have any tips/best practices/important things to remember when speaking with a reporter (via phone or in person)?**

   **Roberts:** It’s kind of weird, but one of the neatest tricks I’ve been taught is to stand when you’re talking on the phone to a reporter. It really does make a difference in how your voice sounds. You sound more confident and sure, and they can’t see you standing anyway. So stand, and project confidence.

   **Hogencamp:** Smile, whether it’s on the phone – yep, any customer service trainer will tell you that smiling on the phone matters – or in person. Be friendly, energetic, enthusiastic and, yes, even entertaining. Use the interviewer’s name. Talk conversationally yet factually. Don’t use jargon or acronyms, and don’t guess or speculate.
Know that messaging matters. Always do your best to stay on message. This skill tends to be one of the hardest to master, but practice makes perfect. Use your talking points to help keep you on track, and don’t be afraid to repeat yourself if necessary. Speak in complete thoughts while also keeping the message simple and easy to understand.

“Be succinct,” suggested Hogencamp. “Short, concise answers make it easier for the reporter to include.” They also lessen the opportunity to be misquoted.

Cooperate during controversy. Bad news happens. Don’t hide from or ignore a reporter. Cooperating on controversial topics or negative coverage will help your side of the story to be included in the article.

“Don’t shy away from an interview if a damaging story is inevitable and it involves you,” Hogencamp said. “While there are exceptions, government officials who are forthcoming during good times and bad tend to increase their credibility with their constituency.”

Maintain your composure. We’ve all heard that it’s not always what you say but how you say it. That advice is especially relevant when interacting with the media. Whether it’s your choice of words or the tone with which you say them, avoid getting defensive or argumentative. You want to build healthy, lasting relationships with members of the media.

Remember that “no comment” is not a good option. Replying to the media with this statement is never a good idea. Often it can raise suspicions about what is being asked. Instead, tell the reporters why you can’t offer a comment or answer their questions. “An honest explanation about why a sensitive issue cannot be discussed will help build credibility,” said Hogencamp.

Know that “off the record” is off the table. Whenever you are communicating with the media, you are on the record. If you don’t want something to be included in the news coverage, don’t communicate it. This advice should be followed from the second you start a conversation with a member of the media – whether via email, over the phone or in person.

Don’t mistake being “friendly” for being a “friend.” If you say it, they can include it.

“Don’t make jokes around reporters,” Roberts cautioned. “Especially if you’re not used to media, you might be nervous and want to break the ice with chit chat. Sometimes that can lead to joking around, and that’s when mistakes are made. When you’re with a reporter, remember that you are ALWAYS on the record.”

Don’t sabotage the relationship. Never take advantage of these relationships that you’re working to build with members of your local media. Don’t complain, beg or whine about coverage. And never ask for special favors.

“Don’t put reporters in a difficult situation by asking them to treat you special, asking them to change something you said or even asking them not to print or air something about you,” Roberts said. Instead, focus on the relationship. “These relationships can be healthy, mutually respectful and friendly.”

Brittni Johnsen is media relations coordinator for the Florida League of Cities. QC

**TIPS FROM JEANNIE ROBERTS**

On your initial meeting with reporters, let them know that you understand they have a job to do and it’s your job to help them do it. It’s an important step toward relationship-building.

When you meet with reporters, offer to give them a sheet of talking points you made for yourself or numbers/graphs. It shows you want to help them get it right.

Be prepared with information the reporter might need to tell your story. Ask what supporting information the reporter might need – numbers, documents, etc. – and then supply that. It will make a positive impression that you offered extra information.

**TIPS FROM KEVIN HOGENCAMP**

Thank the reporters for their interest in your community.

Suggest to reporters that emailing is the best way to communicate. Answering questions by email increases the chance of ensuring that your message is clearly communicated.

Want to cultivate your relationship with reporters? Give them a good story tip every now and then.
Workplace Romance
Should your city establish guidelines?

by Patti Graganella
Florida League of Cities

Workplace romance is still very present in many organizations. However, in the #MeToo era, workplace romance can present a huge risk to employers. The #MeToo movement has triggered employers to re-evaluate policies dealing with ethics, nepotism, relationships and sexual harassment. What can your city do to protect itself when love “goes south”?

Consider having a clear written policy with expectations outlined. It is highly recommended that supervisors be prohibited from dating subordinates under any circumstances. It can protect lower-level employees from unwanted harassment by a supervisor as well as try to preserve morale by avoiding the appearance of favoritism by a supervisor.

Human resources staff also might want to examine the use of a “love contract.” This agreement establishes work guidelines for the involved parties. It states that the relationship is voluntary and consensual and that the parties are aware of the organization’s sexual harassment policy. The purpose is to eliminate the possibility of a later sexual harassment lawsuit if the relationship ends.

Make sure all employees are trained on what the sexual harassment policy states and requires and what procedures to follow should a grievance occur.

You may want to think about requiring employees to inform you when they become involved with a co-worker. This requirement gives the employer the opportunity to lay the ground rules for appropriate conduct in the workplace.

By being proactive, human resources staff members can feel confident that they’ve taken steps to address sexual harassment before a potentially negative situation arises.

Patti Graganella is the chief administrative officer of the Florida League of Cities.
Social Media Verification
The what, why and how to get a checkmark for your account

by Holly McPhail
Florida League of Cities

If you spend time on social media, chances are you’ve noticed the presence of a tiny blue checkmark next to the names of some individuals and companies but not others. Have you ever wondered what these are, if they are important or how to get one?

Put simply, the checkmark means a profile or page has been “verified” by the platform as the actual individual or organization portrayed. The need for verification arose after a proliferation of imposter accounts spreading misinformation were reported. Social media platforms were then challenged with regulating fake accounts and creating a way to award the trustworthy ones. Thus, the checkmark was born.

Being verified gives immediate legitimacy to a profile/page, allowing users to interact with that entity confidently knowing they are who they say they are. No matter which social media platform you are on, being verified confirms authenticity.

For elected officials and local government organizations, the benefits of verification are definitely worth exploring.

“\text{No matter which social media platform you are on, being verified confirms authenticity.}”

WHY DOES IT MATTER?
Beyond just confirming your identity, social media verification has other benefits.

The biggest wins on the biggest platform, Facebook, are found in how your posts perform and how potential fans (or friends) find you. Simply having that tick beside your name gives bonus points in the algorithm that decides who sees what updates and when.

Gone are the days when your posts are seen by all your followers. In its place is a highly sophisticated mathematical equation deciding the social worthiness of your individual updates. All other things being held equal, the company that
has gone through the verification process will have better-performing posts (i.e., more people will see it) than the company that has not.

Verification also gives you a bump in the platform’s search engine return results. Very similar to using Google, a user enters a search term, presumably looking for a person or organization. If that term matches your profile/page name and you’re verified, your profile/page will appear higher on the return list of results.

On Twitter and Instagram, the benefits are a little less apparent. The most important benefit remains the recognition that you are who you say you are.

With this privilege comes access to additional settings for filtering your newsfeed and analytics to measure how your posts are performing. These features are a definite plus if you have a large following and/or use these specific social platforms as part of your communication strategy to inform and engage citizens.

Finally, across platforms, verification gives your account another layer of security. By associating the profile or page with a real person with real documentation such as a tax document or state-issued ID or requiring two-factor authentication every time you sign on from a new device, your account is more resistant to cyberhacking and phishing schemes. Knowing your verified account has an extra layer of protection may be the extra benefit you are seeking for your government profile page.

**HOW DO I GET VERIFIED ON FACEBOOK?**

Just as the benefits of verification vary from platform to platform, so does the process for earning this special distinction. Facebook’s process is fairly clear-cut as it publishes step-by-step instructions to request verification directly on its platform:

To be eligible for verification, you must be an administrator of your business page, and your page must meet the following requirements:

- Be published, which means your page is visible to the public.
- Have a profile picture and a cover photograph.
- Have regular posts.

To verify your page, take the following steps:

1. Go to your Facebook page. Select “More.”
2. Under “Edit Settings,” select “General” and “Verify your Page.”
3. Enter your business’ publicly listed phone number, country and language.
4. Select “Call Me Now” to allow Facebook to call you with a verification code.
5. Enter the four-digit verification code. Select “Continue.”

Going through these steps will help you earn a gray checkmark, which is the first step to earning blue. Blue verification is reserved for public figures such as “journalists, popular brands or businesses, government officials, celebrities, media, entertainment and sports companies.” So, if your page is for an elected official, you will have more options available to you.

Facebook allows for those outside of these categories to apply if they provide a “compelling reason” for why they should be verified, but finding where to send this reason is not easy. This difficulty has led to scammers offering blue Facebook verification for sale. If anyone seeks payment to help you or your organization earn blue verification, do not accept. Contact the Florida League of Cities if you need assistance.

It’s worth noting that the process for Facebook verification will likely continue to change as the needs and demands of the Facebook community continue to morph. If this information frustrates you, know you are not alone.

**WHAT ABOUT TWITTER AND INSTAGRAM?**

For now, the verification process on Twitter is on hold. Twitter has removed the public application for verification. Accounts that already had their blue check get to keep it, and those without are left without one. The League will provide an update when the process is reinstated.

Instagram, the picture-sharing platform, is one of the fastest-growing social media platforms on the web. With daily active users skyrocketing and, with it, reports of imposter accounts, Instagram responded by creating its own verification process to help users confirm the authenticity of other users. Its process to apply for verification is open to the public.

Here are the steps:

1. Open the Instagram app, and navigate to “Settings.”
2. Scroll down, and select “Request Verification.”
3. Enter your full name, and provide the required form of identification (e.g., government-issued photo ID).
4. Hit Send.

Yes, you read that correctly. To be verified, you must upload your ID. Remember, the goal of verification is to prove that you are who you say you are.

Instagram is also looking for some of the same things the other platforms are looking for: a completed bio, high-quality profile picture, actual posts and some proof that the profile or account “represents a well-known, highly searched for person, brand, or entity.” That information is likely good news for larger cities and those who represent them but may not work for some smaller communities. (The League has resources to help you if you apply for verification on Instagram but get turned down.)

**IS VERIFICATION WORTH IT?**

As with all social media activity, you have to determine the level of effort you want to put forth.

Do you have a large following? Do other pages or profiles exist claiming to be you or your city? Do you plan to run for state or federal office in the future? If you answered yes to any of these, then verification is a smart thing and worth the effort.

If you represent a smaller community, have not discovered copycat or imposter accounts, or don’t use social media all that much, you can probably give verification a pass. If you fall somewhere in between and think you qualify, it’s at least worth the few minutes it takes to submit the initial application, especially for a city page on Facebook. After all, who wouldn’t want a status symbol next to their names on the biggest social platform in the world?

Holly McPhail is the communications coordinator for the Florida League of Cities. If you have questions about social media or verification, contact her at hmcphail@flcities.com.
City Ambassadors
Boosting customer service, safety and spirit

by Mandy Stark Bianchi

Each year, volunteers and city staff spend countless hours improving their communities. From sitting on advisory boards to working in the library to fighting crime, these dedicated individuals are invaluable to the cities they serve.

Mirroring what national cities such as San Francisco and Cleveland have initiated, some Florida cities have launched community or ambassador programs to enhance traditional services that are already in place. Ambassador programs are made up of either volunteers or paid employees, but all aim for a “boots-on-the-ground” approach to reach residents in a positive way, identify problems, create solutions and provide better operations and experiences.

For example, the City of Largo recently formed a Community Ambassadors Program using resident volunteers. Ambassadors serve as a point of contact at public and community events on behalf of the city. They promote Largo as a great place to live, work and visit; offer insight and feedback about upcoming projects; volunteer at local events, including festivals, community activities and programs; share information about city programs in person and online; and assist in managing projects based on their strengths, skills and availability.

“Community ambassadors will be our representatives in and around town, in person and online,” said Brenda Clark, community outreach coordinator for the City of Largo.

Ambassadors engage with residents, visitors and community groups. They are aware that volunteering for their city government can positively shape the community. “One week, ambassadors may be with staff at the library collecting resident feedback on a downtown project,” Clark said. “The next week they may be out in the community helping to share information about city services.”

Lifelong Largo resident, Leslie Caplin, saw the announcement for the Community Ambassadors Program and immediately decided that she wanted to be part of it. Caplin is a full-time student at St. Petersburg College studying sustainability management and also has a part-time job, but she fit the program into her busy schedule.

There was a ribbon-cutting for an electric car charging station in November 2018. “It was absolutely perfect for me to attend because of what I’m studying,” Caplin said. “I felt so comfortable right off the bat, and I knew that what I was offering them was appreciated, even as a volunteer.”
**OCALA HIRED DOWNTOWN RANGERS**

In spring 2018, the City of Ocala created a Downtown Rangers program that provides paid city staff who patrol 24 square blocks to offer a helping hand during special events and busy times in the city. The rangers patrol the area in the mornings and nights, when they see larger crowds on the Ocala Downtown Square.

The program has exceeded all expectations, said Bill Rodriguez, division head of the City of Ocala Recreation and Parks Department. “Our two rangers stay downtown in the business district, and their role is to assist the general public in finding restaurants and businesses, helping people locate parking while enforcing parking rules as well as guiding people,” Rodriguez said. “The rangers also hand out literature about our departments with updated information to the business owners and help promote events.”

Additionally, the rangers help with minor issues such as security, vehicle breakdowns or parking violations, which frees up the Police Department’s time and resources.

“The city wanted people who had some public experience, and our current rangers are retired law enforcement officers. They have the street smarts, and they are also great about interacting with businesses and community members,” Rodriguez said. “Residents appreciate getting a ride to their cars from the rangers if it’s raining or if they walked farther than they intended. We consider this a real boost in city customer service, and it makes people want to come back to the city and appreciate what Ocala have to offer.”

**ORLANDO OUTSOURCES PROGRAM**

The City of Orlando’s Community Redevelopment Agency launched a Downtown Ambassador Program in August 2018. Managed by an outsourced company, the program was created to elevate the downtown experience for everyone as the urban core continues to attract businesses, residents and visitors.

Ambassadors work closely with the Orlando Police and Fire departments and the Health Care Center for the Homeless HOPE Team to provide enhanced public safety assistance and direct outreach. Additionally, the ambassadors serve as an extension of the Downtown Clean Team to ensure downtown cleanliness. The team of 17 ambassadors travel on foot, on bikes and in a designated vehicle. They operate as early as 7:00 a.m., Monday through Friday, and until at least 11:00 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

The program has been very successful and has been well-received by residents, said Thomas C. Chatmon Jr., executive director of Orlando’s Downtown Development Board and Community Redevelopment Agency.

“We have indications from the Orlando Police Department that we have decreases in crime and that the trends are going in the right direction,” Chatmon said. “Additionally, many downtowns have a challenge with homelessness and panhandling, but our ambassadors are trained to positively and compassionately to interact with this population, which has been so helpful.”

Ambassador programs have also been created in Hollywood, Jacksonville and Pompano Beach.

Mandy Stark Bianchi is a freelance writer. QC

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**DELRAY BEACH AMBASSADORS FOCUS ON SAFETY, FRIENDLINESS**

The Downtown Delray Beach Safety Ambassador Program assists in making Downtown Delray Beach safer and friendlier by hiring employees to be available on foot and bike to assist downtown. The program is funded by the Downtown Development Authority in partnership with the City of Delray Beach.

This program began in 2016 as a pilot to test its impact, and the results were positive. One year following the pilot program, many downtown business owners and residents saw a decline in issues such as unruly crowds and panhandlers. The program became a permanent fixture in 2018, said Laura Simon, executive director of the DDA.

“Our goal was to bring the program back full time with an expanded footprint and increased number of ambassadors to manage the larger coverage area. We are very pleased with the results of this program so far, both in the hospitality side of the business as well as the management of the nuisance issues we find negatively impacting our community,” Simon said. “The team continues to work closely with our public safety partners to enhance the communication as well as collaborate on ways to increase the perception of safety in Delray Beach.”

Program initiatives include the following:

- Increase the perception of safety within downtown among members of the community.
- Enhance the quality of life by decreasing nuisance issues.
- Increase support for the Downtown Clean and Safe Unit.
- Ensure a positive and welcoming environment for everyone.
- Assist with directions, maps, crossing the street and ideas on what to do.
- Check in with businesses to ensure all is well, and address any nuisance issues.
- Provide “safe walk” services for employees and customers.
- Be visible, and provide a safe and welcoming experience for all.

**PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF DELRAY BEACH**

Downtown Delray Beach safety ambassadors.
Partners in Municipal Research
Strengthening the link between academics and administrators

by Chris L. Holley II
Florida League of Cities

Florida is home to some of the top universities in the country. From Pensacola and Miami to Jacksonville and Fort Myers, each institution of higher learning is growing its expertise through research in a niche policy or issue facing municipalities.

The Florida League of Cities Partners in Municipal Research Program develops and strengthens partnerships between Florida’s public policy researchers and municipal governments, bridging the gap between academics and public policymakers and administrators. The program has 43 participating researchers at 12 research institutes across the state, and it is growing. The Partners in Municipal Research Program was created through the League’s Center for Municipal Research & Innovation.

These universities are thinking through the municipal challenges of today and the future. Areas of research include cybersecurity, social and environmental resilience, disaster preparedness and response, strategic planning and performance measurement, water quality and disruptive technologies.

Academics are hungry for access to data and collaborations with local governments so they can assist with solving these challenges. Connecting researchers with data and test beds will lead to a greater understanding of and valid responses to these issues facing municipal governments statewide. The researchers’ drive to create positive change through research is identical to the determination and passion municipal leaders have to serve their communities.

In a time when we are more connected than ever, this program can serve as the conduit between the needs of a researcher and a municipality. Today, the university that a city connects with can be across the state or down the street. Municipalities can work to build those bridges and make those connections. The CMRI can help.

Chris L. Holley II is the manager of research and innovation for the Florida League of Cities.

Through the Center for Municipal Research & Innovation, Florida’s city officials have access to municipal resources and data, programs and publications. The center holds two annual research symposiums on topical issues, such as recycling, disruptive technologies, Zika and medical marijuana; publishes research articles in Quality Cities and a quarterly electronic newsletter; and conducts the annual CityStats survey and a variety of MiniSurveys.

STATE OF THE CITIES: HOW DOES YOUR CITY COMPARE?
The annual CMRI State of the Cities report is now available. This report is a snapshot of the current state of Florida cities and covers municipal revenues, employment, governance, services and public safety.

The results are based on the annual CityStats survey and MiniSurvey series, as well as data collected from various research institutes across the state and nation.

Just like the residents that call Florida home, no two cities are alike. It’s what makes them beautiful: being unique. Businesses, families, traditions and memories created within our cities become the fabric of their character, charm and individuality.

Visit floridaleagueofcities.com/research to read the recently published State of the Cities report and learn more about the CMRI. Contact FLC Research Analyst Liane Giroux at lgiroux@flcities.com for more information.
Walking has been “the forgotten transportation” as automobiles and other modes of transit have encroached upon humans’ simplest mobility. But walking is making a comeback as people recognize the importance of physical activity to their health. To emphasize the value of walking, the surgeon general has issued a Call to Action to address goals to make walking a national priority.

The Florida Department of Health, Division of Community Health Promotion, recently commissioned a statewide assessment to quantify environmental factors generally associated with walkability. Local planners and designers can use the results to help increase walkability in their communities.

Data from the project, funded through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is available to the public in two formats: an online interactive map that makes it easy to view communities (with access to Google Street View to quickly observe the natural landscape); and for planners, data in GIS format that is available to download for use on desktop computers.

Most walkability studies are performed at a census tract scale. However, the irregular sizes and shapes of the land make it difficult to compare areas. The large tracts can mask data patterns and give the false impression that the walkability is equally consistent across the landscape. To avoid these problems, this walkability project uses a 1-kilometer grid scale to provide higher resolution and geographic uniformity.

Data often considered important to walkability studies include sidewalks, lighting, cleanliness and other factors related to human comfort. However, these data are not available for all counties and could not be included in this walkability formula. The final data selections for the formula are density measures for population, road intersections, commercial destinations, and parks and trails.

The scope of this project is to assess walkability and develop tangible statewide maps that are of value to local planners for increasing walk motivation in their communities. Local officials can also use the information to design environmental changes such as lighting, sidewalks or greenways to increase walking motivation.

This project gathers baseline statewide data considered to be related to walkability. The research could be extended in the future to include more detailed information through localized GIS data and perceptions gathered from local walkers. The combination of these datasets will help planners and others understand the environmental details and how areas are viewed by the community, and they will help ensure a more realistic view of neighborhoods.

Georgianna Strode is an application developer at the Florida Resources and Environmental Analysis Center of Florida State University. If you have questions or ideas for your city, contact her at gstrode@fsu.edu or (850) 644-5886, or visit freac.fsu.edu.

RESOURCES
Walkability Report: fl.a.st/2GZjgeS
Online map: hermes.freac.fsu.edu/che/walk
GIS Data: usng-gis.org/walkability.html
DIRECTORY UPDATES

To keep your Florida League of Cities Municipal Directory up to date, recent changes are included each issue of Quality Cities. Please email updates to Eryn Russell at erussell@flcities.com or fax to (850) 222-3806.

**ALTHA**
Councilman Jimmy Patrick replacing Jana Whitehead. Councilwoman Charolette Januse appointed to fill vacancy. **Next election:** 11/19.

**APOPKA**
Attorney Joseph K. Byrd.

**ARCADIA**
Councilmember Lorenzo Dixon replacing Jerry B. Alexander. **Next election:** 11/20.

**AVENGER**
City Manager Ronald J. Wasson.

**AVON PARK**
Title change only: Deputy Mayor Jim Barnard. Councilwoman Brenda Gray replacing Brenda Giles. Councilman Stanley Spurlock replacing Terry Heston. Councilwoman Maria Sutherland replacing Dora Smith. City Manager David Flowers. Interim City Clerk Danielle Phillips.

**Baldwin**
Councilman Kenneth W. Downs replacing Georgeann L. McKenna. **Next election:** 11/20.

**BELLEAIR BEACH**
Title change only: Vice Mayor Glenn Gunn. Councilmember Todd Harper filling vacancy.

**BISCAYNE PARK**
Title changes only: Vice Mayor William Tudor and Commissioner Jenny Johnson-Sardella. Commissioner Dan Samaria replacing Harvey Bill. Commissioner Betsy Wise replacing Roxanna Ross. Attorney John R. Herin Jr. **New Village Hall address:** 600 NE 114th St., 33161. **Next election:** 11/20.

**BRADENTON**
Councilman Bill Sanders replacing Bemis Smith.

**BROOKSVILLE**
Title changes only: Mayor William Kemerer, Vice Mayor Joe Bernardini, Councilmember Betty Erhard and Councilmember Robert B. Battista. Councilmember Pat Brayton replacing Brent Young. **New City Hall email address:** mcutney@cityofbrooksville.com. **Next election:** 12/19.

**BUSHNELL**
Title changes only: Vice Mayor Karen Davis and Councilman Bill Durham Jr. **Next election:** 11/20.

**CALLAHAN**
Title change only: Mayor Martin Fontes. Councilwoman Shirley Graham replacing Robert Rau.

**CHATTAHOOCHEE**
City Manager Robert M. Presnell.

**CORAL GABLES**
City Clerk Billy Urquia.

**CORAL SPRINGS**
Title change only: Vice Mayor Joy Carter. Commissioner Joshua Simmons replacing Lou Cimaglia. **New City Hall address:** 9500 W. Sample Rd., 33065. **Next election:** 11/20.

**CRYSTAL RIVER**
Mayor Joe Meek replacing Jim Farley and Councilmember Cindi Guy replacing Mike Gudis. Attorney Jennifer Rey. **Next election:** 11/20.

**DAVIE**
Title changes only: Vice Mayor Caryl Hattan and Councilmember Bryan Caletka.

**DEBARY**
Mayor Karen Chazez replacing Bob Garcia. Councilmember Phyllis Butlien replacing Lita Handy-Peters. Councilmember Patricia Stevenson replacing Sid Vihlen Jr. **New meeting time:** 1st Wed., 6:30 p.m. ET. **New City Hall email address:** ahatch@debary.org.

**DESTIN**
City Attorney Kyle Bauman.
**DORAL**
Councilwoman Digna Cabral replacing Ana Maria Rodriguez. Attorney Luis Figueroa. **New City Hall email address: cityclerk@cityofdoral.com.**

**EDGEWATER**
Mayor Mike Thomas replacing Mike Ignasiak and Councilwoman Megan O’Keefe replacing Amy Vogt.

**EUSTIS**

**EVERGLADES CITY**
*New website:* cityofeverglades.org. **Next election:** 11/19.

**FANNING SPRINGS**
Councilmember Ginger Russell replacing Barbara Locke.

**FERNANDINA BEACH**
Commissioner Mike Cédnovich replacing Roy C. Smith. **Next election:** 11/20.

**FORT LAUDERDALE**
City Manager Chris Lagerbloom.

**FORT PIERCE**
Attorney Peter Sweeney.

**FORT WHITE**
Town Clerk Katye Hughes.

**GAINESVILLE**
Interim City Manager Deborah Bowie.

**GULF BREEZE**
*Title change only:* Mayor David G. Landfair. Councilman Todd Torgersen replacing Matt E. Dannheissor and Councilman Randy Hebert replacing Renee Bookout. Attorney Mary Jane Bass. **New City Hall email address:** sabell@gulfbreezefl.gov. **Meeting time change:** 1st and 3rd Mon., 5:30 p.m. CT. **Next election:** 11/22.

**HILLIARD**
Mayor Floyd Vanzant replacing Cris W. McConnell and Councilwoman Callie Kay Bishop replacing Jack Bailey.

**HOLLYWOOD**
Commissioner Caryl Shuham replacing Debra Case. **Next election:** 11/19.

**HOLMES BEACH**
*Title change only:* Mayor Judy Titsworth. Commissioner Kim Rash replacing Bob Johnson. **Next election:** 11/19.

**HOMESTEAD**
*Title changes only:* Mayor Stephen R. Shelley and Vice Mayor Jon Burgess. Councilman Julio Guzman filling vacancy.

**HOWEY-IN-THE-HILLS**
*Title changes only:* Mayor David Nebel and Mayor Pro Tem Martha Macfarlane. Councilor Matthew McGill replacing Chris Sears. **Next election:** 11/20.

**INDIAN RIVER SHORES**
Councilmember Brian Foley replacing Richard Haverland and Councilmember Sam Carroll replacing Michael Ochsner. Town Manager Joe Griffin. **Next election:** 11/20.

**ISLAMORADA, VILLAGE OF ISLANDS**
*Title changes only:* Mayor Deborah Gillis and Vice Mayor Michael Forster. Councilman Ken Davis replacing Chris Sante.

**JACKSONVILLE BEACH**

**KEY WEST**
Mayor Teri Johnston replacing Craig Cates. Commissioner Greg Davila replacing Richard Payne.

**KISSIMMEE**
*Titles changes only:* Vice Mayor Jim Fisher and Mayor Pro Tem Angela Eady. Commissioner Felix Ortiz replacing Wanda Y. Rentas. **Next election:** 8/20.

**LAKE HELEN**
Commissioner Rick Bass filling vacancy.

**LAKE MARY**
Commissioner Jordan Smith replacing Gary L. Brendler.

**LAKE WALES**
*New City Hall email address:* kfields@lakewalesfl.gov. **New website:** lakewalesfl.gov.

**LAKELAND**
Commissioner Sara Roberts McCarley filling vacancy.

**LAYTON**
*Title changes only:* Mayor Bruce Halle and Vice Mayor Gregory Lewis. Councilwoman Susan Grant replacing Norman Anderson. Councilwoman Cynthia Lewis replacing Clarlyn Katie Scott. **Next election:** 11/19.

**LEESBURG**
Commissioner Michael Pederson replacing Robert Bone Jr. *Title changes only:* Mayor John H. Christian, Mayor Pro Tem Elise Dennison and Commissioner Dan Robuck III.

**MAITLAND**
Councilman Michael C. Wilde appointed to fill vacancy.

**MARCO ISLAND**
Interim City Manager David Harden.

**MELBOURNE**
City Manager Shannon Lewis.

**MIAMI LAKES**

**MILTON**

**MONTICELLO**
Councilmember Gloria Cox replacing Steve Rissman. *Title changes only:* Vice Mayor Troy G. Avera Jr. and Councilmember George Evans. **Next election:** 11/19.

**MOUNT DORA**
*Title change only:* Vice Mayor Cal Rolffson. Councilmember Crissy Stile replacing Catherine T. Hoechst. Attorney Sherry Surphren.

**NEPTUNE BEACH**

**NORTH MIAMI BEACH**

**NORTH PORT**
Finance Director Kimberly Ferrell.
**OREGON CITY**


**OREGON INLET**


**ORLANDO**


**PACIFIC BEACH**


**PARKER**

Councilmember Stacie Galbreath filling vacancy.

**PARK RIDGE**


**PARKER**


**PARK RIDGE**


**PARK RIDGE**


**PAWTUCKET**

Mayor Tracy Uphchurch appointed to fill vacancy. Title change only: Mayor Leanna S. A. Freeman. Commissioner John Valdes replacing Todd Neville.

**PENNEY FARMS**


**PENNZOIL**


**PENNZOIL**


**PETALUMA**

New meeting time: 1st and 3rd Mon., 6:00 p.m. CT.

**PICKETT**


**PITTSBURG**

Title change only: Mayor Michelle J. Gomez and Vice Mayor Debra Placko. Commissioner E. Mike Gelin replacing Harry Dressler.

**PLANTATION**


**PLANTATION**


**PLANTATION**


**PLANTATION**

Title change only: Vice Mayor Don Kinsey. Commissioner Wayne Harper appointed to fill vacancy.

**PUNTA GORDA**

Director of Finance Kristin Simeone.

**RIVIERA BEACH**

Attorney Dawn S. Wynn.

**SATELLITE BEACH**


**SOUTH DAYTONA**

City Manager Lee Gillis. Title changes only: Vice Mayor Lisa O’Neal and Councilman Brandon L. Young.

**SOUTHWEST RANCHES**

Councilmember Bob Hartmann replacing Steve Breitkuez.

**SPRINGFIELD**

New City Hall address: 408 School Ave., 32401.

**ST. AUGUSTINE**

Mayor Tracy Uphchurch appointed to fill vacancy. Title change only: Vice Mayor Leanna S.A. Freeman. Commissioner John Valdes replacing Todd Neville.

**ST. CLOUD**


**SUNNY ISLES BEACH**

Commissioner Alex Lama replacing Isaac Aelion. Commissioner Jennifer Viscarra replacing Jeanette Gatto. Title changes only: Vice Mayor Larisa Svechin and Commissioner Dana Goldman.

**SWEETWATER**

Attorney Ray Garcia, Director of Finance Carlos Cintron.

**TALLAHASSEE**


**TAMARAC**

Title changes only: Mayor Michelle J. Gomez and Vice Mayor Debra Placko. Commissioner E. Mike Gelin replacing Harry Dressler.

**TAVARES**


**TEMPLE TERRACE**


**TITUSVILLE**

Title change only: Vice Mayor Dan Diesel. Councilmember Robert L. Jordan Jr. replacing Matthew Barringer.

**UMATILLA**

Title changes only: Mayor Katherine L. Adams, Vice Mayor Laura K. Wright and Councilmember Brian Butler. Councilmember Kent Adcock replacing Mary C. Johnson. New meeting time: 1st and 3rd Tues., 6:00 p.m. ET.

**VERNON**

New meeting time: 1st and 3rd Mon., 6:30 p.m. CT.

**WAUSAU**


**WEST PARK**


**WESTON**


**WILDWOOD**

Commissioner Marcos Flores replacing Don C. Clark. New meeting time: 2nd Mon., 9:00 a.m. and 4th Mon., 7:00 p.m. Next election: 11/20.
These are a sampling of upcoming city-sponsored communitywide celebrations. If your city has an event that you would like included, email Joy Dickinson at jdickinson@flcities.com.

### APRIL

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVON PARK</td>
<td>Blueberry and Bluegrass Festival</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>avonparkrotaryblueberryfestival.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>BONITA</td>
<td>Celebrate Bonita 2019</td>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>cityofbonitasprings.org</td>
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<tr>
<td>BROOKSVILLE</td>
<td>Brooksville Blueberry Festival</td>
<td>April 27-28</td>
<td>brooksvilleblueberryfestival.com</td>
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<td>CUTLER BAY</td>
<td>Easter Eggstravaganza</td>
<td>April 20</td>
<td>cutlerbay-fl.gov</td>
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<tr>
<td>DELRAY BEACH</td>
<td>Delray Affair</td>
<td>April 12-24</td>
<td>delrayaffair.com</td>
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### MAY

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<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>MOUNT DORA</td>
<td>Annual Mount Dora Blueberry Festival</td>
<td>April 27-28</td>
<td>fl-mountdora.civicplus.com</td>
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<td>POMPMANO BEACH</td>
<td>Pompano Beach Seafood Festival</td>
<td>April 26-28</td>
<td>pompanobeachseafoodfestival.com</td>
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<td>ST. PETERSBURG</td>
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<td>April 20-21</td>
<td>mainsailart.org</td>
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<td>FERNANDINA BEACH</td>
<td>Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival</td>
<td>May 3-5</td>
<td>shrimpfestival.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>JACKSONVILLE</td>
<td>Jacksonville Jazz Festival</td>
<td>May 23-26</td>
<td>jacksonvillejazzfest.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>PUNTA GORDA</td>
<td>Hibiscus Festival</td>
<td>May 3-5</td>
<td>facebook.com: Search for “Punta Gorda Hibiscus Festival”</td>
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<tr>
<td>SANFORD</td>
<td>St. Johns River Festival of the Arts</td>
<td>May 4-5</td>
<td>stjohnsriverartfest.com</td>
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<tr>
<td>WEWAHITCHKA</td>
<td>Tupelo Honey Festival</td>
<td>May 18</td>
<td>tupelohoneyfestival.com</td>
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</table>
Healthy Eating
Deciphering the debate over organic and non-GMO foods

One of the hottest nutrition topics during recent years has been the debate over the benefits of organic and non-GMO foods. There are many documentaries and websites that share opposing viewpoints and can sometimes promote misinformation and “half-truths.” So, are organic and non-GMO foods really better for you?

First, let’s establish what categorizes food as organic, GMO or non-GMO.

The acronym “GMO” stands for genetically modified organism. This term refers to any food that has undergone a laboratory process in which genes are extracted from bacteria, viruses, insects, plants or animals and are artificially combined with the genes of an unrelated plant or animal. This process is typically used to make foods more cost-efficient and easier to mass produce.

“Organic” is a generic term used to describe foods that are grown and processed without the use of chemicals or pesticides. Due in part to more expensive farming practices, they cost more than non-organic foods and are not as widely available. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has standards for regulating how organic foods are grown and processed. The USDA offers guidelines on labeling using the “USDA Organic” seal, but products may still be labeled as organic without using the USDA seal or following the established guidelines. Organic foods are always non-GMO, but not all non-GMO foods are organic.

Generally speaking, “non-GMO” is a term for food that has less than 1 percent genetically modified ingredients. The Food and Drug Administration doesn’t have set standards or regulations on the use of this term on food labels. There are also no restrictions on whether these foods are grown or processed using chemicals or pesticides.

People who are proponents of organic food often believe organic foods are safer, better for the environment and more nutritious. A 2012 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine found a lack of evidence supporting the claim that organic foods are more nutritious but did show evidence that eating organic foods may reduce exposure to pesticide residues and antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

A recent study by the Pew Research Center found that Americans are divided over the benefits of organic produce. According to the study, 45 percent of U.S. adults say organic fruits and vegetables are better for you than conventionally grown produce, compared with 51 percent who say that organic produce is neither better nor worse.

Ultimately, there is no definitive data suggesting that either way of thinking is correct. Educate yourself, read labels and consider your health needs and household budget for groceries to make the decision that’s right for you.

Erika Branchcomb is a communications specialist for the Florida League of Cities. QC
What is the Florida Municipal Achievement Awards Program?

The Florida Municipal Achievement Awards recognize innovations and excellence in municipal government.

Who can enter?
The program is open to Florida cities, towns and villages that are members of the Florida League of Cities.

What are the categories?

- **City Spirit:** This award will be given to a city for a specific single citywide effort to successfully address a local need.
- **Florida Citizenship:** This award focuses on city projects or programs that build stronger, more participative residents.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** This award focuses on city programs that promote conservation, improve and protect environmental conditions, and/or provide environmental education and outreach programs within your city.

How does my city enter?
Download the brochure. It is available at [floridaleagueofcities.com](http://floridaleagueofcities.com). Select the “About” tab, then “Award Programs.” All nominations must be mailed to the Florida League of Cities by April 12, 2019.

What must my city submit to enter?
The nomination form, a 150-word summary, a 1,200-word narrative, supporting materials and a letter of recommendation from the mayor, city manager or council/commission.

When are winners announced?
Winners will be announced in June 2019. Winners in each category will received a special, beautifully designed trophy and be featured in *Quality Cities* and various statewide publications. There will also be special recognition in each award recipient’s hometown.

Who do I contact if I have questions?
Sharon Berrian at sberrian@flcities.com or (850) 222-9684.
The Florida Municipal Insurance Trust, with approximately 600 members, has been providing insurance to Florida’s local governments since 1977.

- Workers’ Compensation
- Property
- Auto
- Public Officials Liability
- Law Enforcement Professional Liability
- Health
- Response and Recovery Services
- Cyber Coverage

1.800.445.6248 insurance.flcities.com

$78 million returned to members since 2007.