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Election Season is a Myth

Recommendations for navigating an ever-present political environment

BY MARTHA PEREGO, ICMA-CM

In the not-too-distant past, electing candidates for public office was akin to the rotation and tilt of the Earth. Both had defined seasons with the caveat, of course, that politics, like mother nature, can be unpredictable. With each, we had our equinoxes and solstices. A time for activity and a time for rest.

The predictability of seasons gave local government managers and their staff clear direction. During the campaign season, astute staff kept their heads down, avoided meetings with elected officials designed as campaign photo ops, and curtailed their social activities. An annual community picnic once regularly attended is now off-limits during campaign season when all the candidates make an appearance.

Between the swearing in and the next primary, that period of détente provided all parties with the opportunity to focus on the actual work of serving constituents. While ever vigilant, of course, for the off chance of getting drawn inadvertently into politics, this period did provide the manager and staff with needed breathing room. Parked for a moment were the concerns about ulterior motives of an elected official who sought a meeting with constituents or convened a meeting with elected officials and community leaders to talk about an issue. The focus was on issues, not campaigns.

Perhaps influenced by the culture at the federal level where both newly sworn officials and incumbents alike seem fixated and focused on prevailing in the next election, the season for politicking at the local level seems far less defined as well. In this new environment, managers and staff are advised to be on guard and ever vigilant in recognizing and managing the candidate politics. To that end, here is some advice that applies to all ICMA members who are working for a local government.

Voting: ICMA members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to vote. If you live in a state with closed primaries, you are permitted under the ICMA Code of Ethics to register with a political party for the purpose of exercising that right.

Candidate Endorsements: To be effective in doing your work on behalf of your local government, do not endorse any candidates running for city, county, special district, school, state, or federal offices. Activities to be avoided include public statements of support, yard signs, and bumper stickers, as well as more subtle signs of support, such as appearing on the dais of a campaign rally with the candidate or posting a selfie on social media wearing the candidate's campaign gear. These activities constitute an endorsement.



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Creating and Supporting Thriving Communities

ICMA's vision is to be the leading association of local government professionals dedicated to creating and supporting thriving communities throughout the world. It does this by working with its more than 12,000 members to identify and speed the adoption of leading local government practices and improve the lives of residents. ICMA offers membership, professional development programs, research, publications, data and information, technical assistance, and training to thousands of city, town, and county chief administrative officers, their staffs, and other organizations throughout the world.

Public Management (PM) aims to inspire innovation, inform decision making, connect leading-edge thinking to everyday challenges, and serve ICMA members and local governments in creating and sustaining thriving communities throughout the world.



Candidate Debates:

Forums or debates sponsored by independent organizations provide everyone with the opportunity to learn more about the candidates and their positions. For that reason, you can attend as a private citizen or staff member. What's important is to keep a low profile and be prepared to respond if someone at

a local event tries to draw you into the debate. Practice your response: "I am just here to learn more about the issues and have no comment."

Candidate Rallies: While political, there is a valid argument that rallies are an opportunity to hear more about the candidate's position on the issues. Sitting on the dais behind the candidate is not a good idea. A lower profile in the back of the venue is the best option.

Attending a single event is a learning opportunity. Attending multiple events is crossing the line into a show of support and endorsement for the candidate.

Issues: The guideline on personal advocacy of issues makes it clear that ICMA members do not lose their right to express their opinion. Members share with their fellow citizens the right and responsibility to voice their opinion on public issues. Members may advocate for issues of personal interest only when doing so does not conflict with the performance of their official duties.

Financial Support: Whether it is for an individual seeking elected office, an incumbent running again, a political party, or another organization that makes direct donations to candidates, members should not make a financial donation. All donations, regardless of how modest, are a matter of public record with both names and occupations listed. While the donation may be tiny in the grand scheme of things, you are publicly stating your support for the candidate.

What about other fundraising events, like private parties hosted by supporters or going as a guest to an event? All these efforts, whether a direct appeal or not, are intended to generate financial support for a candidate. For that reason, they should be avoided. The election guideline in the ICMA Code of Ethics states that members shall not make financial contributions or participate in fund-raising activities for individuals seeking or holding elected office.

The season for politicking at the local level seems far less defined.

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If you want to advocate for a position, you can do so. First, make it clear that the opinion you offer is your own. Second, don't use public resources, including your official title, to support a personal stance. Third, focus on the issue and not the candidate. Lastly, you can join and/or make a financial contribution to an issue-oriented advocacy organization. You can march in a protest or rally or participate in a campaign designed to raise awareness. You can put a bumper sticker on your car (just not on a city-issued car).

In the current climate where every issue is highly politicized and partisan, taking a stance can seem very political. For that reason, it's wise to consider the consequences of speaking out. It's not a reason to stand down or stay silent. Just something to consider.

Family Activities: What do you do if your kids want to put up a yard sign? Or protest? Or your spouse wants to make a financial donation? The Code only applies to the conduct of the member. Your spouse can make a campaign donation, even from a joint account, if they sign the check. The yard sign or bumper sticker on the family car are stickier issues to address. How would anyone else know that it is your spouse or child who supports the candidate and not you? Best to have that candid discussion with family about how their political activity can affect you.

Conclusion

On a personal level, you have the right to vote for the candidate of your choice. On a professional level, whether the elected official was your choice or not, consider your obligation to work effectively with all elected officials on behalf of your community.

That county commissioner, state representative, or congressman that represents your local government and the residents will be your ally in bringing needed support during a natural disaster or assistance on legislation. Publicly engaging on behalf of or in opposition to an elected official will impair your ability to serve your official position. Some may respond, "But I live in a city or state that is dominated by one party, so what's the harm in engaging?" Just because it is nonpartisan or dominated by a single party doesn't insulate the process from party politics or party factions. In every campaign, there are winners and losers. Don't bet that you will always select the winner. It's best to exercise your right to participate in the democratic process while observing a politically neutral stance. **PM**

To be effective in doing your work on behalf of your local government, do not endorse any candidates running for city, county, special district, school, state, or federal offices.



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November 9: Webinar: Small Towns, Big Charm: Revitalizing Your Downtown with Small-Scale Manufacturing

November 17: Free Coaching Webinar: Growing Your Career: Tips for Redefining Yourself in the Minds of Others

November 17: How MFA Requirements are Determining Cyber Insurance Coverage for County Governments

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- LGBTQIA+ Experience in Local Government
- Asian American Experience in Local Government Part 2: Trailblazers in our Hometowns (Asian-Pacific Heritage Month)
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- Asian-American Experience in Local Government
- Women Pioneer Managers in the Profession
- A Conversation with Marc Ott, ICMA's First Black Executive Director, and Sy Murray, ICMA's First Black President

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Tapping into the Wisdom of Your Fellow Local Government Leaders

Communities big and small can learn so much from one another | **BY MARC OTT**



Jessica Wilkus, Lindsay Jacques, and Maddison Powers at the 2021 ICMA Annual Conference in Portland, Oregon.

The 2021 ICMA Annual Conference just wrapped up, and for so many of us, it was an adrenaline boost. It was thrilling to be back in person connecting with, learning from, and most importantly, supporting each other. No one knows better than a manager what it's like to confront the challenges of this profession better than another manager. It is impossible to find that unique brand of empathy anywhere else.

Those heartfelt connections can happen on the phone and over Zoom, but they are so much deeper in person over coffee or a beer. For chief administrators in small towns and rural communities, the ICMA staff and I know and appreciate how essential these connections are and that the professional development opportunities, best practices, and resources offered by ICMA are vital.

More than a third of those in service to local government attending this year's conference, whether in person or virtually, came from communities with populations under 20,000. A conference track was targeted directly to small communities, but as I reflect on the conference content, especially this year as we come through a crisis of global magnitude, I found the key messages to be more universal than ever before.

To be sure, there are expectations that residents of small communities have of their leaders that don't happen in a large city, as Ann Marie Townshend, city manager of Lewes, Delaware, pointed out in her session on managing the tangled web of relationships. In this issue of *PM*, Mark Ryckman talks about one potential solution to the unique problem of the lack of broadband in rural areas. But members across communities of all sizes found new insights from conference topics ranging from the "downtownification" of suburbs to post-pandemic technology and work life.

As I took in all that was shared by panelists, speakers, and members over the course of four days, the term *new normal* struck me as obsolete. In the first few months of the pandemic, managers of every community, regardless of whether the population was five hundred or five million, were driven by

a singular focus: to protect our people, our residents, our staffs. What we are continuing to learn from each other is how we adapted. There is immense wisdom to be uncovered from each experience—each mistake and each victory. That wisdom is just as likely to come from a colleague in Timisoara, Romania, as it is to come from Rib Mountain, Wisconsin.

While we managers crave predictability and certainty of outcomes, we have learned that there are now more variables than ever that we must consider. Yes, we need to "ruthlessly prioritize" as keynote speaker Claire Haidar noted, but we must not be so quick to act that we miss the lessons inherent in addressing novel problems. I appreciated the image she shared of pilots "taking a 360" until they feel confident enough to land. It seems to apply across the range of challenges we face—whether returning in-person to city hall or allowing small businesses to keep their outdoor structures. The lessons we are learning and sharing are as valuable as they have been painful.

Before turning these lessons into operating strategies for the future, take a breath. If there is one thing made eminently clear in the past two years, it is that we as leaders need to strengthen our flexibility muscle given the pace of change in our communities. Now is a good time to circle the runway and assess what is working (and most importantly, what is not) before landing on a path forward. And as always, the ICMA Executive Board, the staff, and I remain committed to your success. **PM**



MARC OTT is executive director of ICMA, Washington, D.C.

There is immense wisdom to be uncovered from each experience, and that wisdom is just as likely to come from a colleague in Timisoara, Romania, as it is from Rib Mountain, Wisconsin.

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Success as an Assistant in a Small, Rural, or Remote Community

Navigating an **assistant role** in a new town with less population than you're used to | **BY DAN WEINHEIMER**

Have you ever heard a community member say something like, “People move here and immediately try to make it like where they came from. We don’t want to change. We like it just the way it is”?

That may be a common statement on change, but in my experience, it’s louder and more common in rural communities. *Change* is a four-letter word and not typically welcomed. It is even harder in places where folks may have lived for generations without a great deal of disruption. Many small or rural areas are not looking for new ideas but are simply wanting to amplify or improve what is already happening.

Growing up in an urban area and having largely lived in a series of large cities or hub-and-spoke metroplexes, I am comfortable in that environment. Moving to Colorado from Southern California, I recognized that I was one of “those people”—an interloper—and that I would do well to listen and learn; to show a genuine interest and to ask questions far before making demands. I found that bending my expectations was a much more successful strategy than trying to bend a community to my will.

Many of us are familiar with routinely moving to new communities (and sometimes, states) to advance our career. A benefit to this approach is learning from each place and bringing with you a toolbox full of ideas and practices to adapt to your new community. We can be guilty of the same change mindset that bothers rural residents—we try to make our organizations or communities into something that they are not. Change management practice says that this is possible, but that it needs to be visioned, inspired, and managed appropriately.

Here are some additional bits of wisdom gathered through observation and experience over the years that will help you in working successfully in small or rural communities.

I FOUND THAT BENDING MY EXPECTATIONS WAS A MUCH MORE SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY THAN TRYING TO BEND A COMMUNITY TO MY WILL.

Consider Your Communication Style

Folks everywhere have gotten more and more used to basic language. We are told in designing speaking points that we should do so for an ever-lowering standard—is it the fifth-grade level these days? Nothing stops communication faster than making your listener feel beneath you. Using plain language—avoiding jargon, acronyms, and words that folks need to look up to participate in a conversation—can work to build

connection with constituents. One strategy for reducing the complexity in your communication is to have a layperson read it before you present. Another is identifying a “rural whisperer,” as a councilor of mine likes to say, someone that can read your materials for overly complex words and ideas and translate.

Be Aware of Constraints

Working in a small or rural town can also mean working in a “resource-constrained environment.” The town may have a lower budget than you’re used to, which has a downstream impact on the salaries offered and therefore the talent pool. Your budget constraints may limit available tools or the quality of those tools. This can be a blessing in that innovation and creativity spring from a need that cannot be solved simply by spending. Small and rural communities cannot afford all the tools that you might be aware of on the marketplace. Your colleagues may not all be there for the high-minded purpose of changing the world. All the same, respect the place and show humility as you will learn tried-and-true skills and your ideas can have a transformative effect if you are patient enough to see them implemented.

Respect the Place and the Pace

Many small and/or rural communities have been led by the same people for a long time. Long-time leaders often are not looking for big changes but to continue



DAN WEINHEIMER
is city manager of
Newberg, Oregon.





to tweak here and there. Coming in as an outsider and immediately making huge changes or many small ones can result in failure. You may see that manifest in things slowing down to a crawl—resistance to change as a stall tactic. In this response scenario, folks are waiting for the messenger to get frustrated and move on.

Pacing yourself is important to success anywhere, but

very important in small or rural communities. You should expect to be a hands-on, working manager. This may combine with a long list of needs and limited support, which can be a recipe for burnout. Pace yourself for the long haul!

Look out for GOBs

The good old boy (GOB) can be a fixture in the rural landscape. Power has often been wielded by a few key families for generations in smaller communities. It's important to do your listening and learning before you step into it with a GOB and potentially create roadblocks to your success. Whether you were brought on to be a change agent or simply to continue the path of your community, oftentimes the GOBs have long held the keys to the castle and it's wise to identify and catalog their reach before you accidentally make enemies.

Small and rural communities offer amazing opportunities professionally and often personally. You can expect to gain experience in many areas and also expect to have a hands-on role in advancing your community. Enjoy the ride and don't forget your network—maintaining connection to peers through ICMA can be invaluable. **PM**

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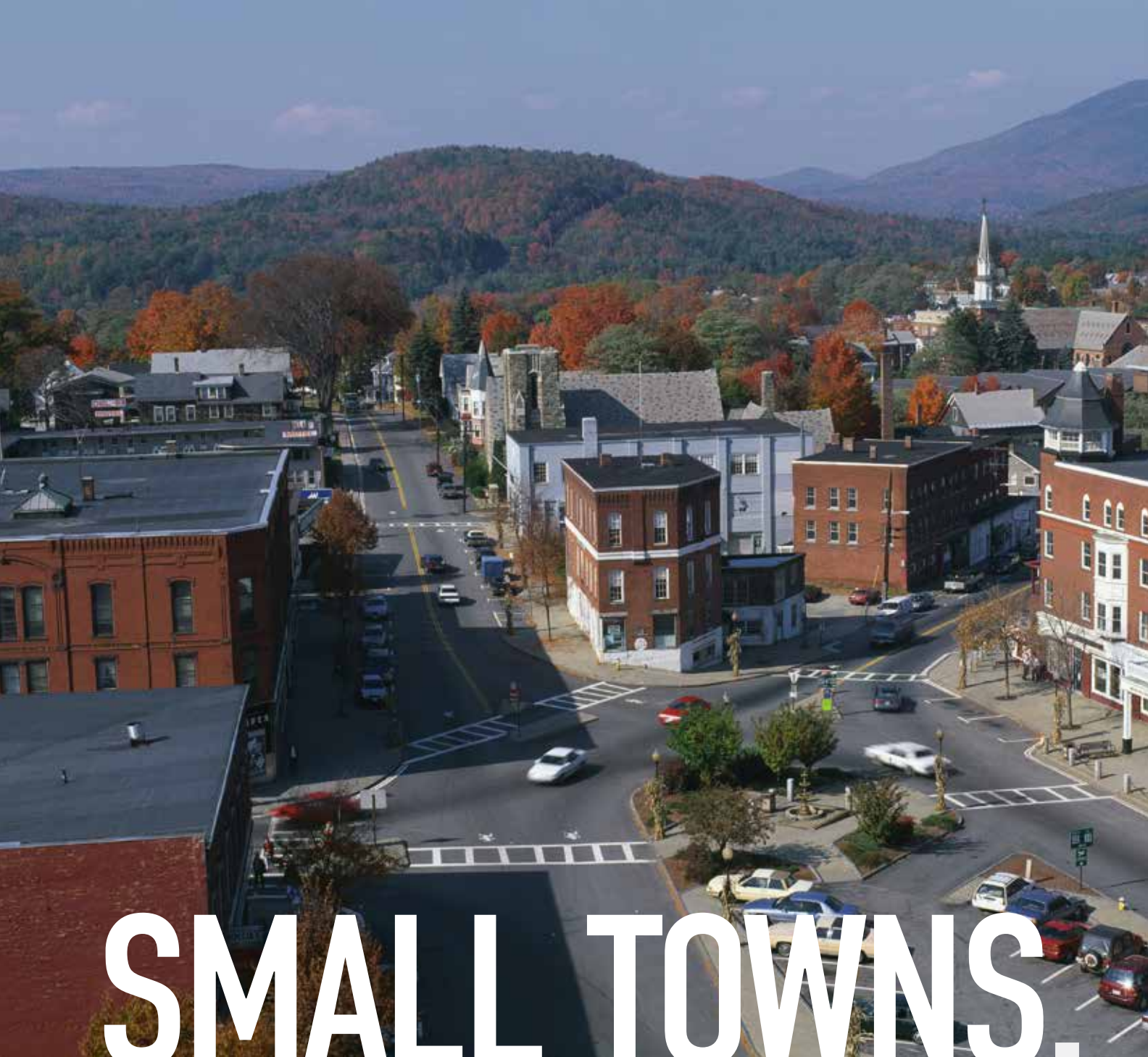


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SMALL TOWNS, BIG COMMUNITIES

What small towns can teach us about building community and public engagement



TIES

BY POOJA
BACHANI
DI GIOVANNA

For the past several decades, there has been a tendency toward bigger: bigger businesses, bigger technology, and bigger cities. We have seen a nationwide push from all sectors of industry toward this ambiguous “bigger” that is supposedly synonymous with “better.” But is bigger really better? Costs and benefits aside, this question affects our day-to-day lives in very tangible ways, beginning with the places we call *home*.

The fact that cities are growing is undeniable. According to the United Nations (UN) Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the urban global population has soared from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion today.¹ This accounts for 55 percent of the world’s population, which the UN projects will rise to 68 percent by 2050. In other words, more

People in small communities rely on one another in part because they have to, but more importantly because they *want* to.

and more people are moving from small towns—which are often the places that their family has called home for generations—to large, urban cities.

This phenomenon is not anything new; we saw a similar pattern of movement during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century and the DotCom boom of the twentieth century. The continued shift to bigger cities is easy enough to understand: many are pursuing opportunities—professional and social—that they believe are uniquely available in urban areas. For some, moving to a city is an exciting chance to live in someplace new, a place different from their hometown. For others, it's a begrudging change they feel obligated or even forced to make because of professional or personal obligation. This latter group would most likely prefer to stay in the small community they call home if it were only feasible, which begs the question, what if it was?

Small towns may not be the home of multinational corporations or the seemingly endless amenities that big cities offer. However, they do offer something that we all desire and ultimately need: *community*. "With fewer people often comes a closeness that simply isn't possible in the anonymity of a larger city. When neighbors know one another and recognize each other on the street, a spirit of cooperation takes hold, and residents work together," according to Neighborhoods.com.² Rather than being lost and atomized in the chaos of a metropolitan area, those living in small towns can truly get to know one another on a personal level. Big-city residents tend to feel extremely lonely despite being surrounded by hundreds or thousands (if not millions) of people.

Loneliness in big cities was a feeling so ubiquitous during the pandemic that it inspired an exodus from large cities like San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City.³

I remember walking through the streets of New York City, my hometown, during the pandemic and it was a ghost town. The scene, like many others from around the world, was eerie: shuttered businesses, empty apartment buildings, and Times Square deserted. Many left cities at the start of the pandemic for areas with more space that still allowed them to continue working remotely; remote work gave city residents a choice they might not have had pre-pandemic. Home buyers and renters sought affordable houses and more yard space for their families, small communities where they can know their neighbors and build relationships.⁴

Familiarity inspires trust, which not only ties families together, but it also ties them to the community as a whole. This closeness produces a special attachment to place, which is inseparable from the people who create and sustain it. People in small communities rely on one another in part because they have to, but more importantly because they *want* to. This reality is so integral to small towns that Alexis de Tocqueville observed it two centuries ago when he wrote that neighbors work together "first by necessity and then by choice" to ensure the success of their shared community.

Small Town Advantages

While many big city proponents acknowledge the closeness that small towns offer, they suggest that the benefits effectively end there. However, there are various other advantages that smaller communities often have over their urban counterparts. For example, simple things like shopping take on new meaning in these communities. When shopping at a name brand store in the city, one is reduced to being a customer in search of a product sold by the store whose leadership is likely many miles away. On the other hand, in a tight knit community, the "customer" is also the friend and neighbor of the seller, who happens to own the local shop. Going a little further, the exchange in a shop feels less like a transaction and more akin to neighbors helping neighbors. Beyond the friendly conversation that comes with a trip to the store, the customer knows that his money is staying in the community and helping to keep his neighbor's business open. Both sides are more invested because they are both parts of the same community.

Beyond commerce, small towns tend to be much safer than big cities.⁵ This safety is especially important for families looking to raise their children in a safe, friendly environment. In fact, in many cases the safety element is what brings city residents to the suburbs and smaller communities. Coupled with lifestyle benefits such as more open space and better air quality, small towns provide a safe haven from the urban jungle.

And small towns are innovative, too! Much has been made of the "smart city" revolution that rapidly advancing technology has opened the door for. Most assume that smart cities are exclusively metropolitan areas that are able and willing to invest in technological change. However, surprisingly, more than 30 percent of smart city projects



are taking place in cities with less than 150,000 residents, according to a survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors. One reason why is that it is easier to engage with residents in smaller towns to gather feedback and inform the public of changes, thereby expediting the implementation of smart city technology.

“In the past, fewer residents meant fewer resources, but that dynamic is changing. As long as there is robust internet access, anyone anywhere can connect to anything at any time, meaning you don’t have to live in a big city to have access to a large community.” This reality is increasingly understood by community developers and smart city engineers alike. “Why should smart city technologies be available only for large cities? They should be available to smaller cities as well,” explains Smart Cities Council Chairman Jesse Berst. The new “smart city” is a “smart community” and there is no requirement that it needs to be an urban space.

The new small town is not the boring, stagnant place illustrated in novels and movies. Instead, these small towns and cities are some of the most innovative places in the world. Simultaneously, these places have a unique ability to maintain the social fabric that keeps communities together. The tight bonds that flourish in communities where residents frequently interact and truly get to know one

another are impossible to replicate—no matter how much data, technology, and information we have at our disposal. In an era in which we are constantly focused on thinking big, we should not neglect how much we can learn from the local, the peculiar, and the familiar that distinguish communities that may be small in size, but remarkable in their intimacy. Some believe that small towns should follow the path of big cities or risk fading into obsolescence, but perhaps it is small towns whose example should be followed instead. **PM**

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PROFILES OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN ACTION



“Maintaining my Credentialed Manager designation is about being at the forefront of my profession. It is also a way for me to demonstrate to my organization and community a high level of commitment to continual learning as we look for new ways to work collaboratively in support of creating a thriving city.”

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Crafting An Effective Community Satisfaction Survey

Especially for smaller communities,
your survey is an indispensable resource
to help you fill in the gaps with data

|| BY BEN
THATCHER





I am a firm believer in using data to guide planning. It works.

Community surveys can be powerful tools to help prioritize competing interests, communicate progress, and tap into the collective will of your residents. But they can also be time consuming and expensive for smaller communities with limited staff capacity and budget.

Years ago, in another city, we conducted a community survey every other year to identify key issues among residents, measure our performance, and use the learnings to chart a sound course for our city.

The survey provided valuable information and became an indispensable resource for our city. But the project also became cumbersome. Over time we added questions to the survey that made it too long for some residents. Respondent dropout rates increased. Project costs rose. The survey became tough to analyze and manage on the backend. We spent weeks combing through the data to develop a report for internal use and for residents accessing our website.

Now in a new role at a smaller city, I wanted community sentiment data at my fingertips, but I needed it to be more efficient, more strategic, and more cost-effective. With the opportunity to build my own system from scratch for the first time, I began by researching to find the best way to collect and utilize data for my community.

Through this research, I've gathered a few insights on how to successfully develop and conduct a community satisfaction survey. If you are thinking of implementing a new satisfaction survey or would like to review and revise your current system, here is my checklist of basics for doing community research right:

Determining the Approach

Start with a clear understanding of what you want from the data. Before beginning to determine methodology, design questions, or even outline topics to include, start with developing a vision. Take stock of what avenues and data you already collect, define what you hope to learn from conducting a survey, and most importantly, outline how you plan to utilize the data. This vision will serve as a touchpoint to guide you through

the entire process of developing a survey, helping you stay true to your original goal and avoid adding unnecessary complications down the line.

Find a methodology that works best for your community. I considered social media monitoring, which has become popular for cities of late and has been pursued by many industries for more than a decade as an intriguing way to mine consumer sentiment. A major difficulty with social media analysis is that public sentiment varies widely, can grossly exaggerate the opinions of a passionate few, and is flighty, subject to the emotional whims of the moment. In addition, my smaller community sees less traffic on social media platforms than a larger community might, and social media analysis is very expensive, especially for what I expected to get out of it.

That's why I returned to quantitative surveys or qualitative research like online focus groups. There's a sound,

systematic process to it that's proven to give an accurate assessment and rationale to public and employee sentiment. Despite its merits, I've also found cons to be aware of, such as:

- **Cost.** Some research companies charge tens of thousands of dollars, depending on the survey length, number of responses, and backend analysis/reporting. Cost estimates can start low but increase significantly during development as extra features are added.
- **Do-it-yourself pitfalls.** Despite the rise of good, self-administered platforms like Survey Monkey, at the end of the day, we end up doing the designing, the fielding, and the analysis to save a little money. And I ask myself, are my questions really that good? Is the data actionable? Is it worth the time of our small team?
- **Sample.** With a smaller population, how am I

Avoid the pitfall of attempting to squeeze everything into one survey. Prioritize the most prominent issues to keep it under 10 minutes in length.

ensuring that responses are statistically sound for an accurate read of my community? What specific strategies can I employ to include hard to reach residents?

To mitigate these concerns, I decided it was best for my community to search for a research partner that could fit within our modest budget and help design and administer a survey.

Finding the Right Partner
Find an independent researcher with long experience across many industries. While experience in local government is great, I like to work with a researcher that also has private sector or even global experience. It shows they're credible and they really know their business. They can bring a fresh perspective, independence, and expertise to city research.

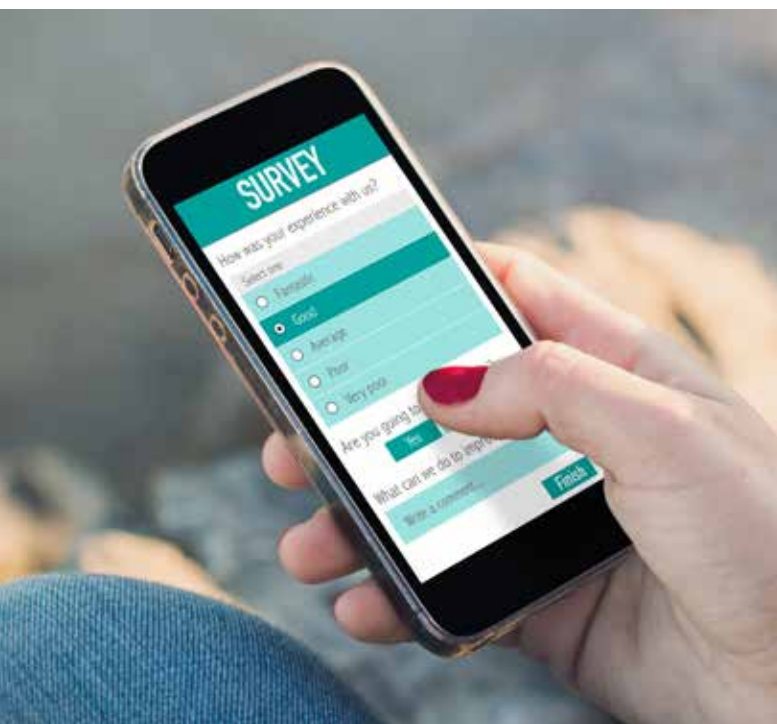
Look for a researcher who collaborates with you. Each community is unique, and a collaborative approach will help meet your needs and assure you don't end up with useless data on the backend that disappoints.

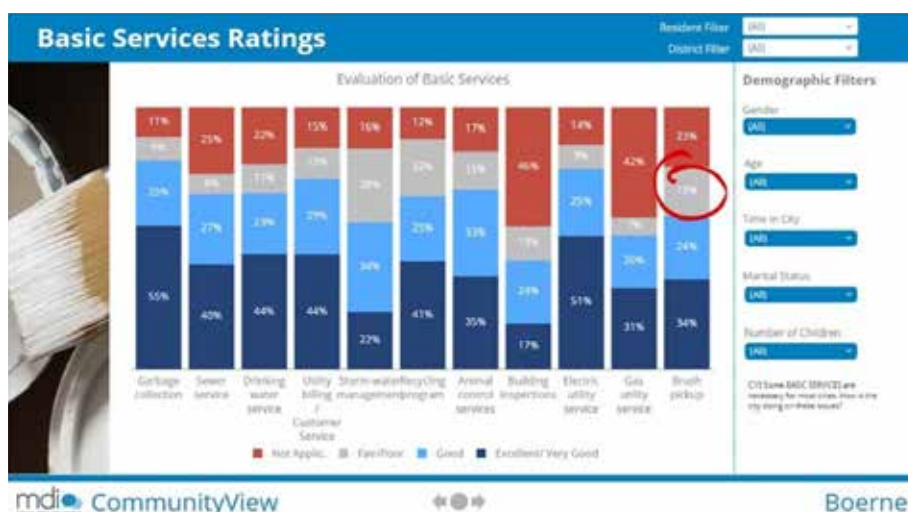
Find a researcher who knows how to make streamlined and simple surveys. A good, streamlined, turnkey community survey with an online dashboard that reports the learnings should cost less than \$10,000, and effective researchers know how to do it. Avoid researchers that try to upsell fancy software, response increases beyond what is necessary for a representative sample, or other extra services that expand the cost of your survey.

Developing your Survey
Develop a survey instrument that's focused on the areas of your city that matter most. Avoid the pitfall of attempting to squeeze everything into one survey. Prioritize the most prominent issues to keep it under 10 minutes in length. A simple and quick survey will encourage residents to participate again in the future.

Make sure it is designed for mobile. In my experience, over 50 percent of my residents take the survey on their phones. Research providers often say their surveys work on any device, but are they prioritizing the mobile design? If not, many residents may have a frustrating experience on their phones.

Make sure the research measures performance. What's the use of trying to improve when you don't know exactly where to improve and how your organization is measuring up? In our surveys, we require a gap analysis that measures importance versus performance. Respondents first identify how important a service or topic is to them and then





rate the city's performance. With this information, we are able to quickly identify the largest gaps between our community's most important areas and performance allowing us to focus our time, energy, and budget to those issues.

Data in Action

Once you've conducted the community survey, make sure you're using that data and it doesn't "sit on the shelf." For example, one of our top gap areas in a recent community survey was water planning/conservation (very important

but rated poorly). I talked to my staff and soon discovered how many initiatives we had going on with water planning/conservation. That put me at ease with what we were actually doing and clarified that the issue wasn't about planning, but with our communication and messaging. We needed to get the word out and showcase our water planning and conservation efforts. Because we weren't telling the real story, others negatively shaped public perception.

Another example involved brush pick-up. Prior to the survey, a sizeable portion of

residents weren't satisfied and suggested several ways to improve our brush pick-up service. The survey didn't indicate heavy dissatisfaction across the city, but enough to get my attention. I asked staff from multiple departments to review our current service and come back with recommendations. They recommended that we make no changes to the service, especially since altering the current service would require additional staff and time.

When asked if they had looked at the data from the survey, they said they hadn't. I asked them to review the

survey results and then see what they recommended after that. After reviewing the data and discussing further, their perspective shifted. They came back with a solution that reduced the number of staff hours required to manage the pick-up and expanded the number of options for residents! Having data at our fingertips helped us solve a budding problem in a better, more efficient way.

Be transparent with results by actively sharing them with your community.

Sharing survey results is a fantastic opportunity to connect with your community and build credibility and trust. Celebrate progress on important topics, share specific actions you plan to address low scores, and use the results as a tool to communicate the wide range of services you provide.

Conclusion

Community research lets us focus. It provides facts that compel us to action. In this case, we're moving forward with initiatives considered in the past that had been left dormant until now. The learnings have now become a strategic source we reference in our city budgeting and planning.

Whether you're a big believer in research or just considering it, filling in your knowledge gaps with data from a trusted partner will give you confidence that the direction you take is worth your time, effort, and money. **PM**

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PUBLIC WORKS

Lessons Learned for a **Small Town**

BY
KATHY
LAUR

How Tonka Bay, Minnesota,
navigated a \$1.9 million water
treatment plant renovation



“There’s nothing like a shiny, new water treatment plant,” said no one ever, until now. After a year and a half of having to work around sandblasters, painters, floor refinishers, and having all their equipment covered in plastic, the public works department in Tonka Bay, Minnesota (population 1,600), is thrilled with their new surroundings.

In May 2017, the Minnesota Department of Health strongly recommended that the city complete an engineering evaluation of the water treatment plant (WTP) due to its age and condition and the resulting challenges to maintaining consistent water quality. The city retained WSB, a consulting firm, to provide an engineering evaluation of the WTP and water tower in November 2017. WSB presented an evaluation report to the city council in February 2018, which included a priority



**“THERE’S NOTHING LIKE
A SHINY, NEW WATER
TREATMENT PLANT,” SAID
NO ONE EVER, UNTIL NOW.**

ranking of the proposed improvements, and the lime feed system replacement was identified as the highest priority improvement. The WTP lime softening feed system improvements were designed in the early spring 2018, bid in April 2018, and constructed in the fall 2018. Most of the improvements were completed as part of the WTP improvements project and were constructed from summer 2019 to summer 2020.

Tonka Bay has a central water treatment plant that uses lime for precipitative softening instead of salt for cation exchange to treat its water. Cation exchange capacity (CEC) is a measure of the soil’s ability to hold positively charged ions. It is a very important soil property influencing soil structure stability, nutrient availability, soil pH, and the soil’s reaction to fertilizers and other ameliorants.¹ Lime is used by many municipalities to improve water quality, especially for water softening and arsenic removal. However, this is not the case in



Hennepin County, the largest county in Minnesota. Using salt in individual customer water softeners is still the prominent method in the area. Indeed, the American Water Works Association has issued standards that provide for the use of the lime softening process in drinking water treatment.

In water softening, hydrated lime is used to remove carbonate “hardness” from the water. Lime-enhanced softening can also be used to remove arsenic from water. Stricter drinking water regulations for arsenic have increased the need for this treatment.²

Hydrated lime is widely used to adjust the pH of water to prepare it for further

treatment. Lime is also used to combat “red water” by neutralizing the acid water, thereby reducing corrosion of pipes and mains from acid waters. The corrosive waters contain excessive amounts of carbon dioxide. Lime precipitates the CO_2 to form calcium carbonate, which provides a protective coating on the inside of water mains.³

Of course, the catalyst for the new renovation in Tonka Bay was the Minnesota Department of Health recommendation, and after about a year of discussion, the city council made the decision to move forward with the renovation. Fortunately, the city was able to secure a low-interest loan from the Drinking Water Revolving

Fund, administered by the Minnesota Public Facilities Authority and the Minnesota Department of Health, for all of the \$1.9 million cost.

There was a lot of renovation that needed to be done starting with the removal of the old lime slaker equipment and adding a new lime tank slurry system in the base of the lime silo. By doing this, most of the lime dust is kept out of the water plant. The water plant itself came next. The clarifier was reconditioned and that included the removal of unnecessary equipment, welding of holes, sandblasting and painting, and new ball bearings, sprockets, and chain. Almost all the valves that run the water plant were

THINGS CAN CHANGE, AND FREQUENTLY DO, DURING THE RENOVATION OF AN AGING FACILITY.

replaced. A hydropneumatic tank that is used as a backup to the water tower was also replaced. The media and wash troughs in all three filters were replaced. The entire WTP was painted—ceilings, walls, pipes and flooring. Pipes were labeled to help identify them. A new roof system was also installed. Additionally, a new generator was installed that will run the water plant in cases of emergency, as well as the city's largest lift station pumps. The WTP upgraded to a full Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system so the effluent water quality will be more consistent with pH

probes that tell the rest of the plant to add more or less lime and CO₂ as needed for better water softening. This also allows the public works operators to monitor the water plant remotely from their phones.

In addition to the city of Tonka Bay, the water treatment plant provides water to six homes in the neighboring community of Shorewood, including the police and fire departments and Shorewood's public works department.

No project is perfect, and Tonka Bay did experience some minor problems during the renovation. American Iron and Steel certified parts were hard to get in a timely fashion, and there were unforeseen issues inside the walls near where a new door on the second level was supposed to be installed so that the filter media could be brought in. The natural gas line to the generator had to be dug after the season's frost set in, making that a challenge. One problem, that no one

Five Things to Keep in Mind When Undergoing a Water Treatment Plant Renovation

- 1 Allow for plenty of time to review the plans with all necessary parties (such as the city engineer before bidding and the contractor before the work begins) to confirm the list of items that needed to be upgraded.
- 2 Stay on top of the progress by visiting the water treatment plant throughout the renovation. It keeps the engineer and the contractor, along with their subcontractors, accountable.
- 3 If something doesn't make sense to you, question it. (For example, painting the floor with an inferior product that doesn't hold up well in a sample area of the plant).
- 4 Know that this undertaking will be a huge inconvenience to the public works staff for several months. They will have to work around all the equipment covered in plastic while sandblasting and painting are taking place.
- 5 Change orders happen, so expect them.

could have foreseen, was the COVID-19 pandemic. While public works was still on the job, city hall shut down and staff were working from home until the beginning of June. In addition to that, there was an issue with the painting

subcontractor. The process of painting the water treatment plant took months longer than it should have. What seemed like a never-ending job finally did end in June, six months after it was supposed to have been done.

Other cities facing the possibility of water treatment plant renovations need to make sure they are clear on what their objectives are and make plans to revisit those objectives during the renovation. Things can change, and frequently do, during the renovation of an aging facility. Good luck! **PM**

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Defense Communities AND THE Civil-Military Connection

According to the Pentagon, there are over 4,000 military installations in the United States, most of which are surrounded by local communities that are tightly linked to their military neighbors. Often referred to as *defense communities*, their close civil-military connection presents both challenges and opportunities for local governments and a unique aspect of working in the public management field.



Bringing local government and military together
for the betterment of the community

**BY JOHN J.
TRYLCH, LTC,
USA (RET)**

Fountain identifies the close connection to the military as part of the very fabric of the local community and an essential element of the city's long-term interests and vision.

Often developed over generations, civil-military partnerships are both intertwined and interdependent, with both military bases and their neighboring local jurisdictions being sensitive to activities on both sides of their respective boundaries. Military training, deployments, basing decisions, as well as local economic conditions, housing, public safety, and local infrastructure often equally impact the same communities they both share and support. Defense communities attract substantial veteran populations, who often shape local community culture, values, and interests in the area. They often work in the community or on base, and even serve in local government roles. In recent years, many of these civil-military connections have been increasingly emphasized by both senior defense officials and local government leadership, who are recognizing the potential in further cultivating and building upon defense community partnerships. This article will discuss one city government that is leaning forward in this area of engagement and strengthening relationships with their neighboring military installations to meet local challenges and bring new benefits to their residents and broader region.

The city of Fountain, Colorado, is located on the front range of the Rocky Mountains on the southern end of the city of Colorado Springs and about 80 miles south of Denver. Fountain immediately borders Fort Carson Army

Post, with Peterson and Schriever Space Force Bases also nearby. With a population of around 30,000 and growing, the city boasts one of the largest military and veteran communities by percentage in Colorado, with approximately 60 percent of residents having some military affiliation. Designated an All-America City by the National Civic League in 2002, Fountain identifies the close connection to the military as part of the very fabric of the local community and an essential element of the city's long-term interests and vision.

For decades, Fountain has proudly provided local government services to its many resident military members, veterans, and their families. Building upon that tradition, Fountain has more recently stepped forward to embrace

City of Fountain and Air Force Officials celebrate opening of a new PFAS Treatment Facility in Fountain in 2018.

Photo Credit: City of Fountain »



Fountain and Fort Carson leadership sign a new 10-year inter-governmental support agreement in 2021.

Photo Credit: Fountain Valley News »



programs and initiatives that further strengthen the local defense community relationship and aim to meet shared civil-military challenges together. For instance, over the past several years, Fountain and the U.S. Air Force have partnered in dealing with the consequences of contamination in local ground water caused

by Perfluorinated Compounds (PFAS). Chemicals used in firefighting foam on what was previously Peterson Air Force Base were attributed to permeating into a local aquifer off base, triggering levels of PFAS in Fountain's ground water that exceeded the Environmental Protection Agency's updated Health

Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship Social in Fountain, Colorado, in June 2021.



Inter-government support agreements enable military bases to partner with local governments to provide installations with a wide variety of services.

Advisory Limit, affecting thousands of residents. Early on, it was clear the issue was one that required a sustained, collaborative solution, so Fountain representatives approached the Air Force—from local base commanders all the way to senior officials at the Pentagon—and worked closely together to develop a joint approach to mitigating the PFAS contamination. The frequent and consistent engagement resulted in significant support to Fountain from the Air Force and the establishment of coordinated agreements between the two that have tremendously enabled the city's ability to provide a safe drinking water supply for residents. Due to these efforts, Fountain has emerged as a national leader in dealing with PFAS contamination and attributes the dedicated efforts made to build and sustain solid civil-military partnerships as a core element of the city's success.

In addition to close coordination on matters of public health and safety, economic development, and military-related activities, Fountain has also led the way among municipalities in Colorado by extending city services onto military bases through inter-governmental support agreements (IGSAs).



These agreements enable military bases to partner with local governments to provide installations with a wide variety of services that they would often normally receive through other means, such as federal contracts. IGSAs result in significant benefits for military bases, as local governments can perform or facilitate the same work at often better prices and much faster than the often-cumbersome federal processes the military frequently uses for the same services. On Fort Carson, for example, Fountain now provides pest control services, and will soon be expanding its direct support to the Army by facilitating small construction projects on post for the garrison. These multi-year agreements facilitate the Army's mission and readiness, while also creating access to new resources that local officials can use to invest in and enhance services within the Fountain community.

Recognizing the benefits of enhanced civil-military collaboration, Fountain's city council and their city management team have also realized the need to invest in developing a team that is familiar with their local

military neighbors' missions, is comfortable interacting with military personnel and officials, and that understands the unique aspects of the defense community that defines their region. One of the ways Fountain approaches such professional development is by serving as a host to the International City/County Management Association's Veterans Local Government Management Fellowship. This program strives to connect transitioning service members in the area to careers in local government, tapping into an accomplished, educated, and enthusiastic talent pool that brings a wide variety of skills and professional experience into the local government management field.

Fountain has enjoyed working with and has hired veteran fellows who have helped the city with a wide range of services and initiatives, including strategic planning, logistics, human resources, contracts management, public affairs, and fleet management, to name a few. Besides the talents that veterans bring with them and the contributions they make in various areas of the city,

the daily interaction between veteran fellows and other city staff also strengthens a mutual understanding of both the military and local government environments, enhancing the city's professional development goals in this area. In addition to VLGMF, Fountain has also designated a military partnerships manager position on the city's staff and has become an active participant in the region's local Military Affairs Council, as well as a contributor to the national level Association of Defense Communities.

As these few examples have shown, what happens "on base" or "off base" is more interconnected than ever before, and defense communities like Fountain are learning to take full advantage of emerging opportunities to advance the relationship between local government and the U.S. military, for the betterment of their communities.

As this trend continues across the country, public managers can benefit from the inclusion of civil-military-related issues and activities as part of their professional development training and programs, as well as leverage the diverse talents and experience of America's veteran population, who share a common desire to serve. Perhaps such integration can be the most valuable and important civil-military partnership of all. **PM**

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EXPANDING RURAL BROADBAND COVERAGE through FirstNet

BY MARK L. RYCKMAN, ICMA-CM;
AND KENZIE CAPECE

A unique public-private partnership provides broadband for public safety services and for rural areas that have been traditionally underserved or unserved.

FirstNet is a significant driver in expanding broadband coverage in rural areas for both public safety and the general public.

For the first time, public safety has a nationwide broadband network it can call its own. Known as FirstNet, the network is built through a public-private partnership between the federal government and the global telecommunications carrier AT&T. Overseen by the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority), a federal government entity, this nationwide broadband network is revolutionizing the delivery of public safety services.

This unique public-private partnership leverages the federal government's ability to engage public safety across the country and builds on the important relationships established in the public safety community in advocating for the creation of a single, nationwide network. The same associations that came together in an effort to better serve public safety now make up the FirstNet Authority's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), which provides guidance and recommendations to FirstNet Authority on the network.¹

The FirstNet Authority's mission is rooted in serving public safety's broadband communications needs and desires. The market engagement team is responsible for working with public safety across the country—in rural and non-rural areas alike—to seek input on current and potential future network use, services, features, and capabilities.² The FirstNet Authority uses that information to continually enhance and improve the network. Most recently, public safety feedback drove the FirstNet Authority to invest in the FirstNet fleet of deployable network assets, increasing the number of available deployable assets for use, which is especially helpful for coverage in rural areas.³ Today, the FirstNet fleet of deployables now consists of more than 100 assets available to FirstNet subscribers by request.⁴

FirstNet continues to offer innovative solutions to public safety such as the FirstNet Flying COWs (cell on wings) and FirstNet One—an aerostat (or blimp) for use in the aftermath of major disasters. This is another example of the benefits of the FirstNet Authority/AT&T public-private partnership in delivering value for public safety.

A Network Designed for Public Safety

As part of the enabling legislation, Congress provided \$6.5 billion of funding and 20 MHz of prime spectrum for the FirstNet network. This spectrum has been combined with 100 MHz of AT&T's own licensed spectrum to provide a

vast network capable of meeting the needs of public safety users on a daily basis.

With FirstNet, responders across the country are able to receive priority access⁵ to broadband communications services during emergencies and day-to-day work, ensuring reliability for their vital communications. In addition to daily operations, such as streaming camera video from police vehicles or allowing firefighters to access building floor plans, FirstNet has been used during a variety of emergency and pre-planned events, including for response in rural areas, such as the Cameron Peak Fire in Colorado⁶ and tribal nations' response during the pandemic.⁷

The growth of the network has been astounding. According to AT&T, there are over 2.5 million connections to the FirstNet network from 17,000 agencies across the country in all 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia. The partnership is just four years old, but already AT&T has deployed over 90 percent of public safety's spectrum across the country. FirstNet is meeting this goal at a faster pace than had been anticipated, since first becoming operational in March 2018.





Rural Expansion

Providing priority access to first responders is a tremendous benefit, but there is also a secondary benefit to FirstNet that is emerging—FirstNet is a significant driver in expanding broadband coverage in rural areas for both public safety and the general public.

This can be traced back to FirstNet's founding legislation, which included significant rural coverage requirements. Congress wanted to ensure that first responders even in remote regions of our country have access to this life-saving network and technology. Coverage in rural areas has significantly increased via our public-private partnership with AT&T, which allows their commercial customers to access Band 14 when it's not being used by public safety.

As a result of FirstNet's expansion into rural areas, the public now has access to commercial broadband in certain areas that previously had little or no broadband coverage. The nature of the FirstNet network is to connect first responders to one another, and with this expansion, responders are





As a result of FirstNet's expansion into rural areas, the public now has access to commercial broadband in certain areas that previously had little or no coverage.

network. The emergency medical services (EMS) associations noted a significant uptick in the use of and need for telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other PSAC members shared insights into how this new technology was improving patient care. Gathering this kind of feedback from current responders and network users from across the country is what enables the PSAC to help the FirstNet Authority to continually improve the network's performance and utility.

Final Thoughts

As we celebrate the increased communications abilities that FirstNet provides to our nation's first responders, we should not overlook the importance of the network's benefits to rural communities in particular. Not only does the FirstNet network offer a secure and resilient interoperable broadband communications platform to public safety operating in rural areas (and non-rural areas alike) to help keep those communities safe, it has also enabled the expansion of broadband coverage to rural areas that have been traditionally underserved or unserved. **PM**

also even better connected to the communities they serve. Because the AT&T buildout brings new towers to areas in which first responders live and work, these communities are seeing more connectivity. More than ever before, connectivity and data usage have increased, and while people live and work at home, there is a focus on bridging the digital divide.

Telehealth Opportunities

The FirstNet network is providing increased opportunities for telehealth through expanded broadband coverage. Especially in rural areas where telehealth can be leveraged to connect advanced life support (ALS) and basic life support (BLS) field providers with doctors or experts at a hospital due to long transport times, patients are benefitting from virtual face-to-face contact, advice, and care during emergencies and when seconds count the most.

Earlier this year, the FirstNet Authority's PSAC convened a strike team to address the use of telehealth over the FirstNet

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The Importance of **OUTDOOR RECREATION** for a Small Town During the Pandemic

NATURE, FAMILY, AND SPORT COME TOGETHER FOR RIB MOUNTAIN, WISCONSIN

In seeking a silver lining to a global pandemic, the town of Rib Mountain, Marathon County, and north-central Wisconsin discovered a golden opportunity.

Like so many communities across the country and around the world, the pandemic hit Rib Mountain and changed the way residents lived their lives.

Rib Mountain (population 7,313) is part of the Wausau metropolitan area in north-central Wisconsin, which has a population of 163,285 (U.S. Census) and a density of 270 per square mile.

**BY GAYLENE
RHODEN,
ICMA-CM**





Rib Mountain
State Park
Tower

Outdoor recreation has been a mainstay for the area. Rib Mountain is home to Rib Mountain State Park and Granite Peak Ski Area. The Rib River and Wisconsin River feed into Lake Wausau. There is a variety of parks, including not only the state park, but also county and town parks. The community also has miles of trails that are maintained year-round. This is why the town

emergency with the “Safer at Home” order. Granite Peak Ski Area still had a few weeks left in its season. Public meetings and hearings were moved to virtual. Local administrators and leaders met weekly via Zoom for updates from County Health Officer Joan Theurer.

Local administrators and government officials used our weekly meetings to exchange ideas on how to handle positive

to contend with whether to open their public pools. Rib Mountain did not have to worry about that, but we did cancel our annual Parks Department Easter Egg Hunt.

As the weather warmed up, people began to venture outside. However, unlike pre-pandemic springs, it became noticeable that more people were using our outdoor recreational amenities. The parks and trails were filled with people. Rib Mountain has a network of multi-modal trails that is part of the overall regional trail system. This system is utilized by bicyclists, walkers, runners, rollerbladers, etc. We also saw an uptick in use of our other parks.

While we tried to put warning notices on the playground equipment about COVID risks, this did not thwart usage. Sandy’s Bark Park, Rib Mountain’s newest amenity, remained as popular as ever for dog lovers. Again, we posted

signs to request that park users socially distance. For safety reasons, we turned off water fountains and closed restrooms for public use. People continued to use the parks more than ever, including parks that were noted to be underutilized in the past. Basketball courts that seemed unused suddenly rebounded with new life.

Rib Mountain’s experience was no different than what others were seeing. According to the Marathon County parks, recreation, and forestry director, Jamie Polley, the county overall also witnessed an increase in park use.

“Camping was a significant one,” she said. “Our campgrounds were at or near capacity most weekends and overall camping revenue was up 36 percent over what we had budgeted.”

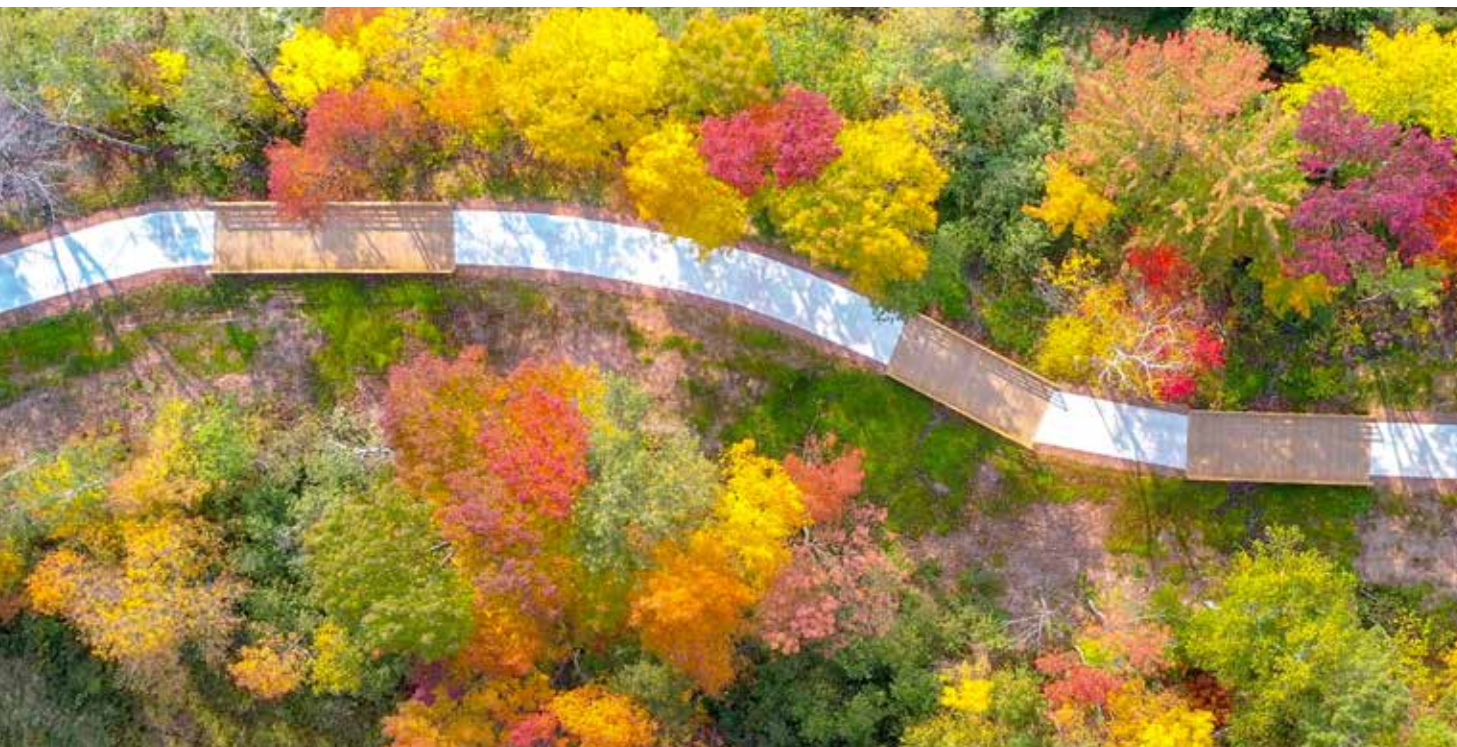
Rib Mountain State Park Manger Bayli Christorf also saw a jump in usage. “The Rib Mountain State Park saw a

THE PANDEMIC FORCED MANY OF US TO STAY CLOSE TO HOME. OUR RESIDENTS BEGAN TO SEE THEIR COMMUNITY DIFFERENTLY AND VENTURED OUTDOORS.

of Rib Mountain’s motto is, “where nature, family, and sport come together.”

We like our indoor activities, too, including festivals and shows. But on March 12, 2020, Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers declared a health

cases of COVID-19 within our workforce, how to conduct public meetings during the pandemic, whether to require masks, etc. We also discussed our local playgrounds and recreation programs. Some communities in the area had



Trillium Trail in Rib Mountain. Photo by Lemmens Creative Design.

substantial uptick in visitation,” she said. “From ... 2019 to 2020, Rib Mountain State Park saw just over a 50-percent increase in visitors.”

The State Park Road Trail, which sits at the entrance of the park and leads to the top of the mountain, saw a tremendous amount of use by walkers year-round. Rib Mountain State Park was not an outlier either, according to Christorf, who said this was a statewide trend.

IRONBULL, a nonprofit charitable organization that promotes outdoor adventure sports in central Wisconsin, was also impacted by the pandemic. Andrea Larson, executive director of IRONBULL, also chair of Rib Mountain's Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Committee and member of the Rib Mountain Park Commission, said that the

pandemic required thinking outside the norm. IRONBULL events typically involve kayaking, trail running, and mountain bike races. Larson said they had to cancel their 2020 Memorial Day weekend event, but instead held a virtual event and marked courses in the area at no charge. Once IRONBULL was able to hold its events in-person, it implemented safety protocols

like staggered starts, and survey results indicated that participants felt safe.

“Many racers were hungry to be outside and participate in events,” she said. “Both the Rib Mountain Adventure Challenge Winter Edition and Rib Mountain Adventure Challenge (in May 2021) saw about half of participants racing their first-ever adventure race.”

Like IRONBULL, we in the town of Rib Mountain had to pivot and modify our recreational programs. After consultation with the county health department, we went forward with our playground summer program for 2020 and 2021. The program typically runs the first week in June until the first week in August for elementary school students. The program



Campsite at the
Marathon County Campground

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Kayakers in Rookery Park.
Photo by Lemmens Creative Design

typically involves crafts and games such as dodgeball and kickball. We reduced the number of participants allowed in the program to almost half of the number that typically participate. Kids' temperatures were taken upon entrance, and activities were primarily held outdoors, especially in summer 2020. The limited slots filled up fast. The 2020 summer

recreation program was the first time that elementary kids could participate in an in-person activity since the mandatory closure of schools in Wisconsin.

Our winter recreation program also continued during the pandemic. We opened our ice rinks and warming shelter to help keep skaters warm but not all warming shelters in the area were opened during this time.

We increased our cleaning, enforced social distancing, and implemented capacity limits.

We replaced our Easter Egg Hunt with a Valentine's Word Search Project, an outdoor activity that encouraged social distancing. The word search had participants visit each town park to find certain letters hidden at the park to make a word. When all the words were

found, a phrase would be put together. People then brought their completed phrase to the collection spot at a certain time to collect prizes. Again, safety protocols were in place when people came to pick up their prizes. The program was so popular that it will most likely return next year.

In the midst of the pandemic, Rib Mountain continued to add to its trail network. The Trillium Trail was commissioned prior to the pandemic, but construction began in late spring 2020 with completion in the fall. The 10-foot-wide paved trail extends 0.79 miles along Interstate 39, featuring a paved pathway, and boardwalks through a wetland area. Rib Mountain received a \$492,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation Alternatives Program. The ribbon-cutting ceremony had more than 50 attendees. IRONBULL helped kick off the event with a community bike ride.



Granite Peak.
Photo by Lemmens Creative Design



A competitor in the IRONBULL Race. Photo by Ann Illagan Photography



Top middle: Bayli Christorf, property manager, Rib Mountain State Park

Top right: Andrea Larson, executive director, IRONBULL

Bottom: Jamie Polley, parks director, Marathon County



There were several park projects that continued to move forward during the pandemic. Rib Mountain opened its first disc golf course. Again, this was a project that was planned prior to the pandemic. The nine-hole course was opened this past May. The ceremony included a safe, socially distanced event with how-to instruction on disc golf. We upgraded playground equipment and worked on the expansion of the dog park.

One of the more critical projects during the pandemic was the update to Rib Mountain's Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP). In order to be eligible for state grants, a municipality must have a five-year plan. Rib Mountain partnered with the North Central Regional Planning Commission to draft the ORP.

With typical plans, surveys find information on residents' interests, concerns, and

expectations for our parks. Unlike previous plans, Rib Mountain had tremendous feedback this time around. The survey was conducted in spring 2021 using our town newsletter, social media, outreach to local bicycle groups, and the use of QR codes for easier survey access. When asked about outdoor recreational activities in which respondents regularly participated, 86% said walking/hiking. Other popular activities included canoeing/kayaking (53% of respondents), boating (48%), paved trail bicycling (47%), and mountain biking (44%). When asked what potential recreational opportunities should be developed, respondents overwhelmingly said more mountain bike trails and paved bike trails.

Not all parks or programs were fully utilized during the

pandemic. We saw a decrease in our shelter rentals due to limits on mass gatherings. We also decided to cancel our tennis program and Bike Rodeo kids' safety program. We anticipate that these programs will return. During the leniency of gatherings earlier in 2021, facility rentals increased; however, we are seeing cancellations again due to the threat of the COVID-19 Delta variant.

It has been an interesting time for our parks system. The pandemic forced many of us to stay close to home. Our residents began to see their community differently and ventured outdoors. Rib Mountain saw the impact in parks and along our trails. New activities were born out of the pandemic, like our Valentine's

Word Search. While Rib Mountain does not have the ability to track the number of users, it was visibly noticeable. The town's ORP update seemed perfectly timed, allowing officials to build upon this newly developed interest in our parks.

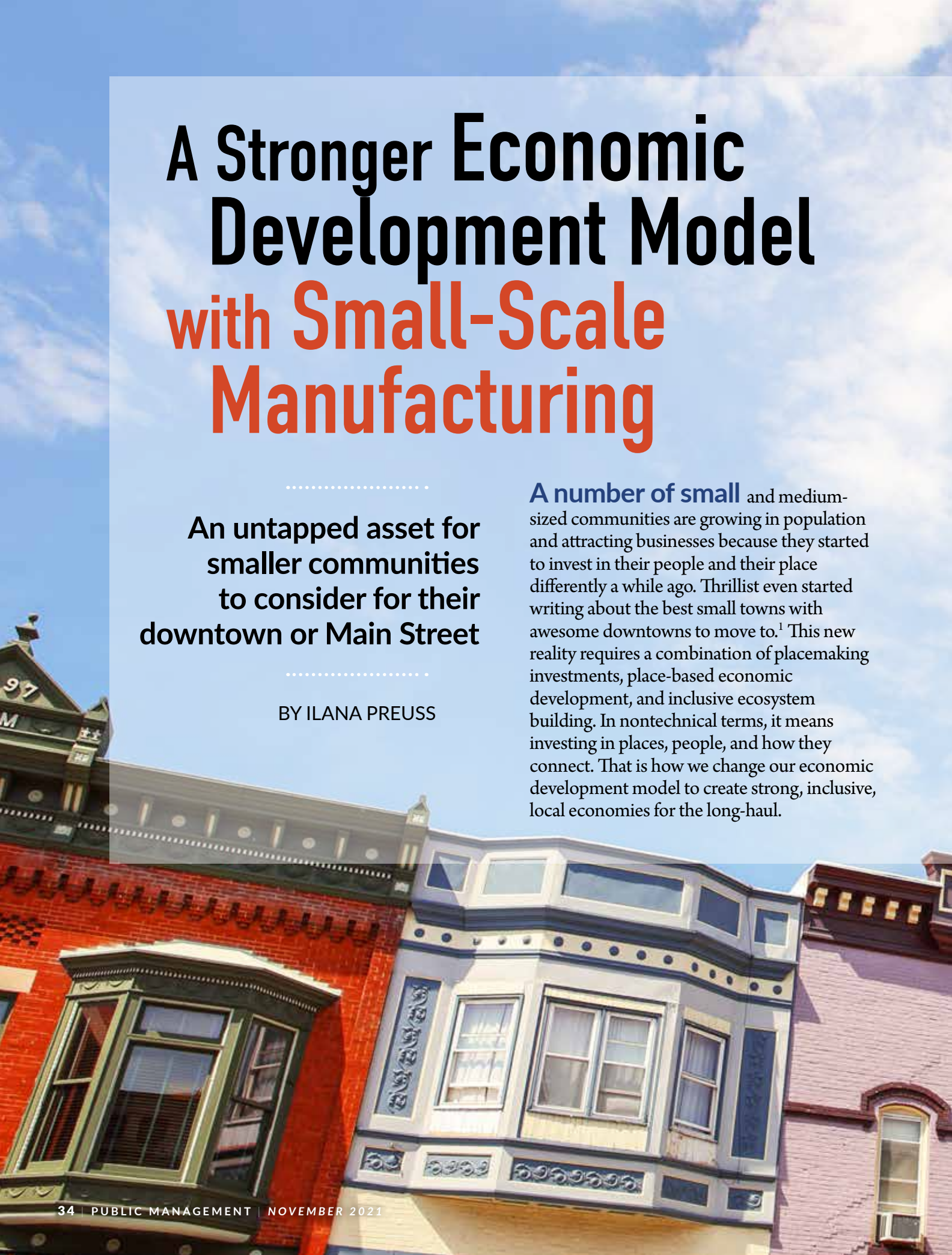
"I feel it was very eye-opening to our elected officials, as well as the community, how important our parks are and what they were able to provide when there wasn't much available," Polley said.

Rib Mountain sees it the same way. **PM**

I would like to thank outgoing (and soon-to-be-retired) Marathon County Health Officer Joan Theurer. Rib Mountain and the surrounding municipalities thank her for her years of service and guidance during this challenging time.

GAYLENE RHODEN, ICMA-CM, is town administrator of Rib Mountain, Wisconsin.





A Stronger Economic Development Model with Small-Scale Manufacturing

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**An untapped asset for
smaller communities
to consider for their
downtown or Main Street**

.....

BY ILANA PREUSS

A number of small and medium-sized communities are growing in population and attracting businesses because they started to invest in their people and their place differently a while ago. Thrillist even started writing about the best small towns with awesome downtowns to move to.¹ This new reality requires a combination of placemaking investments, place-based economic development, and inclusive ecosystem building. In nontechnical terms, it means investing in places, people, and how they connect. That is how we change our economic development model to create strong, inclusive, local economies for the long-haul.



Three fundamental tenets of this new economic development model are core to this work:

1. Investing in the place is key to economic strength.
2. A unique identity of the place is essential to long-term value.
3. Social connections are essential to economic resilience and the place's "stickiness."

And small-scale manufacturing businesses help us achieve that model.

Investing Is Key to Economic Strength

Small-scale manufacturing businesses are wonderful in storefronts. They draw people to an area to see cool stuff made, they help attract investment to neighboring properties (especially when they are filling a vacant space), and they are uniquely of that place. No one else has that business owner, with that brand and that product, anywhere else. These businesses make people proud of their community, their main street, and their downtown. They often buy supplies locally, hire locally, and have deep roots in the community.

Every place (a neighborhood or downtown or main street) is stronger when it is loved by the people who live there. You know that a place is loved when you see it. Storefronts are cared for, and people gather and spend time there. It isn't about property value. Rather, it's about pride in the place in small and important ways.

For instance, does the neighborhood have its own festivals and gatherings?

Do people say that they come from that neighborhood or that city with pride? Do residents feel that the place is invested in by the district authority, local government, or local businesses? There are a million ways—many of which are very low budget—to invest in a place, but it takes the community coming together to make it happen. Do we want gardens in vacant lots? Stoops or sidewalks swept clean by business owners? Public places where people can gather? What does it look like to walk down the street? Are storefronts filled with activity and open for consistent hours?

These acts signal to the property owners and to local business owners that this place is worthy of investment. Each act is a small way to invest in that place. These acts signal to local residents that it is a place to spend time and money.

Local leadership investing in the place is essential to economic success. And that includes public, private, and political investment in that place. For instance, many communities work to implement the elements of complete streets—wider sidewalks, traffic calming, and landscaping—and places for the community to gather in plazas downtown. These investments signal to property and business owners that a place is worthy of their time and money. For example, Lancaster, California, saw an increase in investment in downtown worth ten times the investment that the city put into these kinds of elements. For the \$10.6 million the city invested in wider sidewalks, landscaping, a plaza for people to stroll, and steps to slow traffic, the private sector invested \$126 million in the area. The city had a

26-percent increase in sales tax revenue from this area, and the community added 80 jobs.²

We also need to acknowledge that some places might be loved by their residents but neglected by the local jurisdiction. The local budget might be shrinking, and it costs money to take care of a downtown or a neighborhood main street. The properties on main street might be owned by distant investors who neglect maintenance. Some main streets may not be maintained because the jurisdiction doesn't see them as an essential investment. We know that there is a historic, as well as present-day, difference in how much a city invests in different neighborhoods because of race. It is visible in many communities. Are there certain neighborhoods where the garbage piles up in front of businesses? Are there vacant lots? Is there litter? Are

there festivals, but only ones directed at bringing in people from outside the community or for tourists? In a smaller city or town, does community investment go only to new commercial development at the edge of the jurisdiction? In a town with one main street, do the storefronts only include white-owned businesses and not businesses from the racial and ethnic diversity of its population? These issues all illustrate different kinds of neglect, different ways of saying that certain people and certain places are more important than others.

Unique Identity Is Essential to Long-Term Value

Places that are unique make us feel like we are somewhere special. That difference, that special sauce, that thing that makes it stand out—whatever it is that makes it the place it is—



draws us in and makes us want to spend time there.

Think about a place you've been that feels different and special. It might be a small rural town or a neighborhood in a big city. The uniqueness of the place makes you curious about what you might see that you won't see somewhere else. That the place is special makes us feel special and gives us a boost of energy. It doesn't matter if it is our own hometown main street or one we choose to visit. Some real estate developers pay big dollars to create an "authentic" experience, recognizing that it will draw future development and investments. They know that it will draw tenants for apartments and customers for shops. Large developers create a destination, events, and a brand for a place before even launching sales of property or development.

Your history, your people, and your local business owners are what makes your downtown or main street special. It might be naturally occurring in your community, but you didn't really notice it as an asset before. Each place needs purposeful work to create this in a way that is inclusive so that we are building up the local economy, not displacing it. And small businesses (especially small-scale manufacturing businesses) can be a way to ensure that everyone in your community feels that this opportunity to build the local economy and build community wealth is available to them.

Highlighting the identity of your community and being inclusive require asking some questions. Who are the people in your storefronts? Who do they represent? Who owns the businesses? How are they designed on the front and inside

Your history, your people, and your local business owners are what makes your downtown or main street special.

to reflect the personality of the owner and of the community? How is this business specific to your place and region? How is it specific to the neighborhood and the people who live there? Most important, when you look around, do you know if you are in a specific place?

Answering these questions should reveal a place that will reflect the community and retain value over time. This main street with unique businesses cannot be replaced with a new mall with national chains down the road because is no other place like it in the world.

Social Connections Are Essential to Economic Resilience and Stickiness

The connections between business owners and people in the community are essential to economic resilience. Many types of connections matter, but personal, social connections draw people to a place and make them want to stay (its stickiness). These connections can also be important when a community needs to adapt and recover in the face of disaster.

Researchers have found that personal connections between business owners are important to the business's survival in the face of national disasters. Local business owners with strong connections to other owners were more likely to survive crises and reopen after

a disaster, whereas those with fewer connections were more likely to go out of business.³ The people with connections bartered services or deferred payments because of their social capital with the other business owners. Their social connections made them 24 percent more likely to be resilient than owners with weak connections.⁴ Those connections become even more important when the economy is unpredictable or weak, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These connections can be important to a business's success even in stable times because these business owners can learn from and lean on one another, as often seen with startup programs working with cohorts of business owners. Successful programs also provide strong connections to expert mentors. A study of New York City tech startups found that businesses with strong personal connections to successful founders and with strong mentors were more than twice as likely to succeed as those without strong connections.⁵ Places that invest purposefully in these cohorts and connections reap the benefit of stronger small businesses and, with direct action, could result in a more inclusive and diverse community of business owners. Cohorts for Black-owned businesses, for example, can offer support and help owners overcome barriers to launch and create strong local businesses.

Attachment to a place (its stickiness) is also essential to its economic survival. Why do people stay in the town or city if they could have the opportunity to go somewhere

else? In a study called "Soul of the Community," the Knight Foundation and Gallup found that there are three major reasons people stay in a community:

1. People feel included.
2. There are places to gather.
3. The place has a beauty in its buildings or natural environment.⁶

This connection is not about economic opportunity. It's not about salaries. It's about connections—emotional and physical—and inclusion. In the end, however, the result for the city is about money. That same study found that places with a higher stickiness factor also had higher rates of growth in gross domestic product (GDP), with the rate of growth exceeding the population rate of growth by two and a half to three times.⁷

We see this distinction echoed in real estate studies: people are attracted to locations that have places to walk to and gather and to places that have that special something. The National Association of Realtors surveys people every two years about community preferences to help its members understand trends in what attracts households. This survey is a window into changing preferences. In the 2017 survey, the most recent, some of the top priorities for people deciding where to live included homes that are an easy walk to places like shops and parks and communities that have safe sidewalks.⁸ These preferences were echoed in an Urban Land Institute housing study of millennials, which showed that community character and proximity to shopping rank among the top priorities when these younger adults decide where to live.⁹

We need all three of those fundamental parts listed above—inclusion, gathering spaces, and beauty—to build a strong local economy. We also need to invest in the place; we need to show who we are and the inclusive, unique sauce of our community; and we need to help business owners continue to build stronger connections. That's the way to create a place that people want to stay and invest in, as well as a place that will attract other investments and entrepreneurs.

We will only achieve these outcomes with purposeful actions that will benefit residents from the entire community, attract businesses and people, and strengthen the local economy. That feeling of being included, of feeling valued, of feeling connected to others in our community, does not happen automatically.

And for our business owners, it doesn't happen across racial and ethnic lines without concrete, intentional actions from city leadership.

Invest in Target Locations: Downtown, Main Streets, and Neighborhood Centers

Placemaking means to make a place that is distinct and to invest in a place where people can come together. The subject gets a lot of coverage in the media and in real estate, economic, and planning trade materials, and many communities are working on placemaking in their downtowns. They know that a strong downtown is essential to a strong local economy.

Targeting one location does not mean that others will be neglected; rather, it means that we work on implementing

changes and taking action in that one place with a burst of energy to be a catalyst and show people what is possible. When we focus on a target location, residents can quickly see the impact and get excited about getting involved in what comes next. It also allows us to try a new idea in one place to see if it works before we roll it out to the rest of the jurisdiction. When we target locations for investment, we can be more effective, lower the risk of investments, and create success faster for our local small businesses than when we spread our energy out over multiple locations.

In a small town, making these investments on main street may be enough. In larger cities, though, it may be necessary to also invest in neighborhood main streets. These local main streets were

often the commercial center of the neighborhood. In many communities, these places were neglected as cities emptied out in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in predominately Black neighborhoods. Today, these same places are an amazing opportunity for locally owned businesses to move into storefronts and build wealth for a local household. We need to make it a priority to target neighborhood centers and work with the residents to bring these places back to life. We need to do it with purpose and intent to break from the old model and the systemic racism that neglected these places and do things differently. If we do not think purposefully about who benefits from investment, we leave people and places behind.

Unfortunately, it is still common to see investment directed at wealthier White



communities. A study looking at St. Louis, Missouri, found that government tools such as Tax Increment Finance incentives were pulling investment away from predominantly Black neighborhoods in the city.¹⁰ Another study found that cities that are more segregated spend less on public services throughout the entire city compared to cities that are less segregated that spend more on public services on average.¹¹

Cities often continue to invest more in the neighborhood centers that are already thriving. These places bring in tax revenue, and the city wants that to continue. Yet these places are thriving because of historic investments in that place. A struggling neighborhood center has likely been neglected for generations. Areas that were redlined in the

The reality is that most communities are not using all the local assets available to them to be successful. In fact, most communities are doing this work with at least one hand tied behind their back.

1930s are generally still more economically distressed, with lower household incomes, lower housing values, and lower rents,¹² than areas that were not redlined. If local leaders want to invest in places that are already doing well—so that they do even better—the neglected neighborhood main streets are unlikely to ever catch up. It is important to think about what purpose we are trying to achieve with these investments. And we need to do so with fresh eyes at historic injustices and the systemic racism baked into our economic development and planning decision-making.

The Exciting Potential of Small-Scale Manufacturing

Small-scale manufacturing businesses can help you make these four pieces of the new economic model become a reality. These businesses can help each community create a thriving and unique place. They can help build an inclusive economy in which more people have the opportunity to build wealth. They can be brought into the work quickly to help achieve short-term and visible wins. This business type is not a solution for all our community challenges, but it can make a

big difference in solving more of them, and faster.

The reality is that most communities are not using all the local assets available to them to be successful. In fact, most communities are doing this work with at least one hand tied behind their back. And in many cases, one of the local assets not engaged, a major missing piece, is small-scale manufacturing businesses. (Remember that small-scale manufacturing businesses are ones that create a tangible product that can be replicated or packaged, across any material, be it hot sauce, handbags, or hardware.)

Although the Small Business Administration defines *small business* as one with fewer than 500 employees, small-scale manufacturing is much smaller. In most communities, this business sector is in the “microenterprise” category, with one to 20 employees, so that it can fit into the existing buildings in and around downtown. In larger cities, where existing building spaces may be larger, small-scale manufacturing may be as large as fifty employees. Most important is that these businesses fit into spaces in our downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods because they are modern production businesses—clean, quiet, and great neighbors.

Small-scale manufacturing businesses are an untapped asset for downtown and main street. We can achieve many more of our purposeful outcomes faster when we include this missing business sector in our work. And no, bringing small-scale manufacturing businesses into the work is not going to make all those outcomes happen tomorrow. It will take a lot

more than that. But those businesses are essential to creating that future, one that is inclusive, strong, and proud. **PM**

Reprinted from Recast Your City: How to Save Your Downtown with Small-Scale Manufacturing by Ilana Preuss.

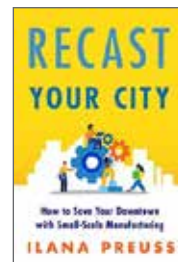
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ILANA PREUSS

is the founder and CEO of Recast City (recastcity.com).





What's Different about **STRATEGY** in the **Public Sector?** | BY KEL WANG

We cannot just copy and paste what is done in the private sector without acknowledging the context of the public sector.

What is a strategy?

Strategy, what a buzzword. Let's just pause for a second and ask ourselves: what is a strategy? What does a strategy look like in the context of our work? It is one of the most frequently used terms in the private sector. It is a sign of leadership. If you are a leader, you are supposed to know strategy, period. But what does it mean in the public sector? Is there any difference between the public and the private sector?

Thanks to *PM* magazine, I have published over a dozen articles on strategy. But not until recently was I asked those very questions. Here is my response for your consideration: strategy is a choice about the broad approach an organization is going to take toward executing its mission and, in doing so, achieving its vision. The two types of strategies in the public sector are comprehensive and single-issue based. A comprehensive strategy, such as a strategic plan, covers a broad range of issues and is driven by aspiration. A strategy that is single-issue based, such as the resilience strategy or the community wellness plan, focuses on one topic. Single-issue based strategies are meant to address an issue or solve a problem. For simplicity, you can think of a strategic plan as an organizational strategy or an overarching strategy, and a single-issue based strategy as a functional strategy.

The Current Issue

By definition, the life cycle of a strategy can be broadly categorized in two phases: formulation (the creation and

approval of the approach, also known as strategic planning) and execution (the implementation of the approach).¹ Strategy was not prevalent in the public sector until the early 1980s when strategic planning was introduced from the best-run private sector companies. The idea is to improve from traditional, long-range planning that very much takes a functional view of issues versus an organizational view taken by strategic planning.

Another premise of strategic planning is that organizational success is contingent on the fit with its environment (also known as Harvard Policy Model), which is not considered in the traditional planning approach. The main purpose of strategy in the public sector is to help public sector organizations “create public value,” to use Mark Moore’s language² or “build a better, sustainable community,” to use my own. Now, it is almost everywhere. You rarely see a public organization that doesn’t have a strategic plan or any sort of strategy.

But maybe not as promising as anticipated, according to the Association for Strategic Planning, more than half of the strategies are not reaching their potential due to poor execution. So, what happened? What the data has informed us is that even though everyone—from the strategists,³ managers, elected officials, community stakeholders even to the public—has worked hard to formulate a strategy, there is still a high risk that the work is not being implemented properly as planned, or in many cases, not being implemented at all, ending up sitting on a shelf collecting dust.

When strategy is not executed properly, it leads to a series of missed opportunities and challenges:

1. First and foremost, the associated community outcomes would be compromised or not realized at all.
2. Second, when work is not getting done or not getting done properly, elected officials may feel they have to step in to make a difference. As a result, it builds an unproductive routine with elected officials as they want to feel more assured or they see this is the only way to get things done.
3. Last, within the organization, it sets a bad tone for culture as staff would perceive a lack of commitment and accountability.

Research conducted by the National Center for Public Performance at the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers University—Newark for a network of U.S. professionals in public organizations in 2014 has shed light on the execution issues.⁴ According to the research, the three main barriers for sustainable performance management

systems, which are essential for strategy execution, are:

1. Lack of experience and understanding of principles within the organization.
2. Lack of capacity, in terms of resources, availability of data and technology.
3. Lack of motivation to use results-based information.

To understand why they are significant, we ought to understand the context of strategy work.

Public vs. Private Sector Context

The public and private sectors are different. Here we are focusing on four areas that affect the public sector strategy execution the most:

Influence

At its core, the public sector strategy is to “build a better, sustainable community.” Most of the long-term goals are broad in nature at the community level. For example, if it is in the strategic plan, one of your goals could be building a healthy

and greener city; or in the climate change plan, a goal could be reducing community greenhouse gas emissions; or in an economic development strategy, building an entrepreneurial ecosystem. Those goals identify the areas where opportunities lie. But what’s the role of our public organizations in each of the areas? Has the strategy sufficiently considered what is within the organization’s control and influence when committing to those goals?

The local government plays an integral role in building the community, but the role sometimes varies depending on the issue and your community. So, when people formulate a strategy, envisioning a

future without properly analyzing (or at least considering) the impact of our own actions due to lack of understanding and experience of the uniqueness of public sector strategy, is one of the reasons why strategy is not executed as expected.⁵

Prioritization

I rarely see a local government that has one or only a handful of services. Many services are legislated by law, such as elections, economic development, land-use planning, tax collection, and many are desired by the community, such as fire, transportation, police, and childcare. Also, unlike the private sector, public organizations must aim to serve everyone within the mandate; we must consider vulnerable populations and can’t just leave people behind. Lastly, our staff is busy. Projects related to executing the strategy are just a small portion of staff work. The majority is the operational work that

What does a *strategy* look like in the context of our work? It is one of the most frequently used terms in the private sector. But what does it mean in the public sector?

is often not observable. They are busy with implementing or closing prior strategy projects, delivering day-to-day services, handling politically sensitive projects, and being good team players supporting other orders of governments, peer cities, community partners, or other departments, among many other things. Executing the strategy could be seen as just another area of work landing on their desk.

Effective prioritization in such a context is quite challenging. It requires sufficient data and thorough situational analysis (also known as environmental scanning) to identify and clarify (as much as possible) the strategic issue(s)⁶ amongst the multiple lines of services and the diverse population, and then pick and choose actions that are based on impact and not just alignment.⁷ It also requires the consideration of organizational capacity. To implement the strategy, the organization needs to have sufficient capacity either from reallocating existing resources, from adding new resources (such as new tax levy), or from other means.

For example, in the face of the climate emergency, climate change may be identified as one of your strategic issues. If you were to formulate a climate change strategy, then you will need an analysis to indicate why climate change is a priority—why it matters to the community, then within the issue, what are the right actions understanding each community is different:

- Is it climate mitigation, in terms of avoiding or reducing emissions, or climate adaptation, in terms of adjusting to the effects of climate change?
- Should we base our strategy on actions within the administration's control, such as the administration's own mitigation and adaptation actions, or on actions in collaboration with others in the community?

The answers should not be based on alignment, a list of actions that shows relevance, but should be based on impact, an evaluated list that shows effect. Last but not the least, can we implement either using existing resources or must we use new resources? Are we prepared to reallocate? Are elected officials prepared to justify the rising taxes or is it the right decision to drop certain work (through reallocation)? Any of

the aforementioned questions not answered would jeopardize effective prioritization. So, another reason a strategy may not be executed as expected is that analysis is not done properly due to lack of understanding and experience of uniqueness of public sector strategy, or lack of capacity in terms of resources or data.

Governance

Elected officials are chosen by the people to represent their interests and to make policy decisions. What is often overlooked in this process is that they are also the “board of directors” of a public organization and have a governance role they ought to play. After winning the election, they may receive an orientation session about the ethics and their roles and responsibilities, which helps provide guidance in representation, policy making, and hopefully how to have an effective council-staff relationship. But this leaves a significant skill and mindset gap in terms of governing and championing a public sector strategy versus simply approving one, which speaks to the first barrier of why strategy is not executed as expected.

Knowledge and Motivation

The staff plays a critical role in execution. They get the work done, collect the data, and have the results reported. To execute the strategy successfully, people need to have the skills to do what they are expected to do and have opportunities to contribute, not to mention that the strategy has to resonate and staff can see leaders, colleagues, and others start to behave differently. But even at the moment you are reading this article, we can barely find a public sector strategy course in our education institutions, which creates many challenges for those who are practicing strategy.

People are good at driving because we do it all the time and get instant feedback. Strategy, not so much. Even the most seasoned managers might get to see a handful of strategies from start to finish over their careers. That's not much practice.

In public organizations, there is also a tendency to treat the work as the project of the year; a piece of work that happens at a point in time. But how would that help with execution that occurs at a later date after the strategy is approved, not to mention the impact may take months if not years to realize and be reported? Insufficiently addressing organizational context, in terms of knowledge and motivation, speaks to all three barriers.

Implications

It is obvious that the aforementioned factors are shaping how we execute strategy in the public sector. We cannot just copy and paste what is done in the private sector without acknowledging the context of the public sector and not knowing our own organizational and community context where the strategy lives. For a public sector strategy to be a success:

1. It needs to recognize the varying role the strategy asks the organization to take on and consider the organization's impact.



Table 1. Actions to Strengthen Strategy Execution in the Public Sector

ACTION	RESULT
1. Individual capacity building	- Increased understanding of the governance role and strategy literacy - Improved skills
2. Customer insight, environmental scanning, and impact assessment	- Evidence-based strategic issue identification and clarification - Evidence-based decisions on strategy formulation
3. A two-way approach	- Increased buy-in - Increased capacity for strategy execution

2. It needs to prepare decision-makers for making a tough prioritization decision (while they approve the strategy) based on evidence in addition to individual values and voices.
3. It needs to consider the understanding of the governance role by elected officials and enhance strategy literacy⁸ over time.
4. It needs to address the organizational context where the strategy lives.

Based on the public sector context, a set of actions are required (Table 1). Some actions are one-time, situational to the strategic issue and the strategy (Action 2)⁹ while some require ongoing development, building organization maturity over time (Action 1 and 3). Individual capacity building includes multi-pronged training: governance development for elected officials, leadership development for executives, and technical skill development for staff. In many cases, there may be a need to upgrade the knowledge for strategists. Most critically, the roles have to be in sync because strategy is not inherently valuable. Value really comes from the coordination of roles and the consistency in functions as a result of strategy. Simply put, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Action 2 calls for an integrated approach for analysis. While customer insight and environmental scanning are prevalent in the private sector, sometimes both are missing in the public sector strategy formulation process. Impact assessment evaluates the potential impact (community outcomes) based on the proposed strategy and cross-references with the original strategic issue.

A two-way approach working with staff involves leveraging subject matter expertise throughout the process; demystifying performance management and developing individual capacity to implement, measure, and report strategy. Over time, the staff

You rarely see a public organization that doesn't have a strategic plan or any sort of strategy.

wouldn't see formulating and executing the strategy as another job landing on their desk, but the way they manage their work and how they "build a better, sustainable community."

We have gone through two iterations of strategy development approaches, moving from strategic planning to strategic management, and are experiencing another—strategy management. We have learned a lot from the private sector and possibly our own successes and lessons. Maybe it is time to make something of our own that fits the unique context we face in the public sector. Maybe it is time to find a "strategy" that helps develop your own. **PM**

ENDNOTES AND RESOURCES

- ¹ Together, strategy formulation and execution is known as strategic management.
- ² Mark H. Moore, *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, 1995.
- ³ For more information about the definition of strategists, please read "The Evolving Role of Strategists," Kel Wang, PM magazine, June 2021, <https://icma.org/articles/pm-magazine/evolving-role-strategists>.
- ⁴ Source: Obstacles and opportunities for sustaining performance management systems by Marc Holzer and others, 2017.
- ⁵ A clear signal of this is no measure is identified for the strategy.
- ⁶ Strategic issues are issues that matter greatly to the current and future community. They are the results of a comprehensive environmental scan and the origin of a strategy.
- ⁷ Alignment indicates the action contributes to or helps address the strategic issue, but the effect of the action is not considered. Impact indicates both the relevance and the effect.
- ⁸ Strategy literacy is the ability to understand and use strategy as a tool to achieve desired results.
- ⁹ The organizational uptake and capacity for Action 2 can be developed through Action 1 as well.

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High Performance in Local Government

Part 6 : Growing Culture, Cultivating Change

When, where, and how we use leadership work to grow the culture and cultivate change

Over the past five issues, we have looked at the building blocks that help create a culture for higher performance. That endeavor starts with our beliefs about people, work, and people working together—our leadership philosophy. It occurs almost entirely with a focus on the health of our organization, rather than its “know-how.” It depends more upon leadership than management. In this final article, we will

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look at the when, where, and how we use leadership work to grow the culture and cultivate change.

Evolution, Not Revolution

Creating a culture for higher performance is a long-term effort. It is not a project with a deadline. It is a continuous journey that requires patience and perseverance. It is more a proverbial “20-mile march” than a dash for the finish line.



simply assimilated into the organization's existing operations. We keep changing but nothing ever really changes. Think about how we have adapted cell phones and social media into our operations. For the most part, we do the same things in the same way, we just use different tools.

Meaningful organizational change requires more. Fundamental change in the way we work, evolving from a Likert System 2 to a System 3-4, requires a variety of efforts and change agencies. First, a clear understanding of what we are striving for; second, a practiced skillset of teamwork and facilitation; third, a parallel organization as a change mechanism at all levels of the organization; and fourth, a major transformation of the organization's strategies, structures, and systems, aligning them with the leadership philosophy and operating values.

Change Agency 1: Walk the Talk

To be successful, change efforts require demonstrable role models, champions of the new way. However, no role model can "walk the talk" without first understanding what the "talk" really means and then developing the skills to "walk" it. That understanding and skill development is the leadership work of building clarity and competence. People in the organization must be given the opportunity to learn, understand, and experience for themselves the meaning of the high-performance principles and leadership philosophy.

One effective way to provide that opportunity is

TO BE SUCCESSFUL, CHANGE EFFORTS REQUIRE DEMONSTRABLE ROLE MODELS, CHAMPIONS OF THE NEW WAY.

through formal organizational development programs, whether in-house or through outside sources, such as our classwork and seminar at University of Kansas. Those programs should not be viewed as "training." They need to be thought-provoking and challenging, seeking to build mutual understanding about how the organization intends to do its work.

In Johnson County, Kansas, we developed a program called Leadership Empowers All People (LEAP). The program has been attended by thousands of county employees, building a common understanding of the culture and the way the county chooses to do its work. The county also developed a Skills to Enhance Performance (STEP) program to build greater competence in working together. While not all attendees become champions of the change, many do, and the program has produced a very active and visible culture.

Change Agency 2: Leadership Teams

As previously discussed, higher performance happens when the work of leadership gets done in organizations. The forum for that work is "leadership teams." Not teams of hierarchical

"leaders," but teams at all levels in the organization doing leadership work. The leadership teams should have sufficient formality that they establish responsibilities for the group, and they should function both within the hierarchy (production side of the organization) and the parallel side. We believe that it is essential that Leadership teams be established at all levels.

Leadership teams drive the change. They are where we ask the high performance thinking questions, where collaboration and team dynamics begin to flourish, and where new ideas and creative learning build solutions. They provide the means for greater engagement, a real-time opportunity for employees to experience meaningful autonomy, mastery, and purpose related expressly to their particular work.

Change Agency 3: Parallel Practices

We have also outlined the parallel organization concept. As a change mechanism, it is the greenhouse in which culture grows and change gets cultivated. While change can certainly grow from any one place in the organization, it is greatly enhanced when, at all levels of the organization, all work units and work groups, formal and informal, use parallel practices.

The relationships formed in parallel, the behaviors developed, the skills practiced, the learnings experienced will become new habits and practices that get transferred into all work of the organization. Moreover, the green house is the source for creativity, a place for bouncing

Creating culture should be viewed as growth and development of the organization, evolving from the present to a more advanced, preferred way of doing work. Certainly, change occurs, but that change isn't made using a "take away the old and plug in the new" approach. Rather, it is a process where we grow out of our current stage and develop into the new one.

Agencies of Adaptive Change

While change occurs regularly in organizations, it is too often

ideas through collective thinking, for evaluating “smart risk” opportunities, and for removing the barriers and “killer phrases” that are so detrimental to new ideas.

Change Agency 4: Values, Behaviors, and Alignment

Key to both cultural growth and adaptive change is a commitment to shared values regarding how we behave and do our work. Those values must be more than posters on a wall or lists of policies for employees. They must be standards and guidelines that help determine “is this the right thing to do?” We develop meaningful values only when they are understood in action terms. What actions are consistent with the values? What actions are not? We answer the questions only through purposeful discussions. It cannot be left to individual interpretation, nor to some authority figure. It must arise from collective appreciation.

The formal processes and actions of the organization must also be consistent with the shared values. We cannot say that we value teamwork but always act and reward individual behavior. Our change efforts will be hindered substantially, if not totally, without a constant evaluation and norming of our strategies, structures, and systems. Please note, however, that we cannot simply jump in and make changes to our strategies, structures, or systems. To do so would not be consistent with the values and the way we intend to work together.

Alignment, then, is leadership work at all levels of the organization, work that can and should be the responsibility



of leadership teams, working primarily in parallel. The work efforts are then transferred into the hierarchy side for actual implementation. Working through the leadership teams not only generates better thinking, but it reinforces the culture and cultivates the change.

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Change Agency 5: Getting the Threes to Dance

As an old story goes, organizational change efforts can be viewed by imagining a high school dance. There are some who believe that dances are lame and choose not to attend—the ones. There are those who show up, but hang around the parking lot reluctant to join in—the twos. There are those who show up, socialize, and dance when the music stirs them—the fours. There are those who show up and are the popular life of the party—the fives. Then there are those who show up, enjoy being there, appreciate the music, watch the fours, and dance when asked. Those are the threes.

In organizations, we too often take the threes for granted. We spend too much time and management trying to get the ones and twos to join the “dance.” We rely too heavily on the fives and fours to enliven the “dancing.” Our leadership

challenge for embedding change in the organization is “getting the threes to dance.” How do we invite the steady, the reliable, the comfortable workers to grow and become full participating dancers?

Certainly, in this change effort, you must deal with those who choose not to come along, perhaps even helping them pursue a career elsewhere. You must be attentive to those who would be your primary change agents, providing them with coaching and opportunities. However, you must enroll and involve the stable group of employees that make the organization work. Ignore them and you will likely fail. Include them and you will likely succeed.

Culture Care

Growing a culture is just the beginning. The health of the organization must be constantly attended to, nourished, and sustained. It requires routine check-ups,

using diagnostic questions. It needs key indicator measures, such as engagement surveys and Likert evaluations. It should have established healthy habits, such as normal processes for feedback and coaching, sharing sessions to reinforce relationships, and structured mechanisms for exercising the thinking and practices of the culture. Finally, the organization should regularly schedule and conduct learning sessions on key parts of the culture to renew understanding and enhance knowledge.

At Johnson County, Kansas, we created several useful health habits:

1. **Triads**—groups of three who met frequently to coach each other, to offer observations and feedback, to hold each other accountable, and to share learnings and experiences.
2. **Book Club**—groups would form to read books of interest on organizational development topics and then pass along the learning in teaching sessions.
3. **Check-ins**—conducting some personal sharing at the start of every meeting.
4. **Each One Teach One**—graduates of the leadership development programs shared the learnings with fellow employees.

While we offer these “habits” for your consideration, they are certainly just examples and by no means exclusive. We encourage you to establish culture care habits that work best for you and the health of your organization.

Putting It All Together

Creating a culture for higher performance requires seeing

both the forest and the trees together. It is systems thinking, where the big picture is as important as the details. Over this series, we have offered you a quick, simplistic view of the basic elements of a higher performance culture. How you put them together is a choice for you and your leadership teams. While there is no prescribed methodology, there are important ingredients. For us, they are:

1. **A Focus on Purpose**—Why You Do What You Do. That’s purpose, not mission. Why do you build and maintain roads? Why do you have a library or park? Why do you tend to public health or transportation? Purpose inspires people. Like the janitor told President Kennedy on his visit to NASA, when asked what he does there, “I help put people on the moon.” Public service is meaningful whatever your part of the task. Help those doing it to feel and live that meaning.



PURPOSE INSPIRES PEOPLE. LIKE THE JANITOR TOLD PRESIDENT KENNEDY IN HIS VISIT TO NASA, WHEN ASKED WHAT HE DOES THERE, “I HELP PUT PEOPLE ON THE MOON.”

2. A Participative Leadership Philosophy—What You Believe Matters.

As we’ve discussed, autocratic management restricts performance capability. Higher performance comes from believing that people are capable and willing to perform excellent service. They just need the right environment, built on consultative and participative practices.

3. Understood and Shared Values—Clarity and Competence.

People are more engaged and work more productively when they feel safe, when they are trusted, and when the work is value-driven rather than rule-enforced.

4. Teamwork Dimension—Working Together.

A teamness attitude is essential to collaboration, and the teaming relationships and behaviors are more important than the structural teams.

5. Doing the QII Work of Leadership.

Leadership practices are work, for individuals and for the organization. It is work that must be done. Create the pathways that enable it to be done well.

6. Employing Leadership Teams to Think for the Organization at All Levels.

Teams doing

leadership work, not a top-heavy executive decision-making group, drives the higher performance activity.

7. Building the Parallel Organization to Do Meaningful Work.

It is not productive to do QII work in a QI environment.

Our Final Thoughts

What you do makes a difference; what you can do together is so much more. We hope that you undertake the journey, choose to create a higher performance culture, and when the time comes, you choose to dance. **PM**

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