

A Day in the Life of a City Secretary



Lila Fuller is an example of the hundreds of hard-working, dedicated officials serving small cities in Texas. We think it's important to profile these public servants from time to time.

Lila Fuller is a Texas Registered Municipal Clerk (TRMC) and has been employed with the City of Nacogdoches since 1985. She has worked in the police department, municipal court, and city secretary's office. She currently serves as city secretary, a position she has held since 1997.

Lila is married to Craig, her husband of 25 years. They have three children, ages 24, 20, and 17. Lila is also the proud momma of a very spoiled (by her own admission) Yorkshire terrier named Harlee; a "grandog" Catahoula named Brinn, who is now a permanent visitor; Mac the border collie; and two cats, ShiskaBob and Spook.

Lila is active in the TML affiliate, the Texas Municipal Clerks Association, Inc. She currently serves as immediate past president. She has also served on several TML committees over the years. Lila enjoys singing in her church choir and helping as much as possible in the church nursery.

Describe a typical day.

Let me first clarify that there are no typical days in my office. That is part of what I enjoy so much about my job—you never know what's around the corner!

A *typical* day generally consists of going through e-mails, answering phone calls, and preparing for an upcoming city commission meeting. My office also coordinates all of the grants the city applies for, so we continually research new funding opportunities and prepare reports for any active grants.

I am the administrative assistant for the city-county emergency management coordinator, so I periodically have to pay bills and prepare reports for that office. I am also the administrative director of the East Texas Regional Water Planning Group, which contracts with the City of Nacogdoches to perform administrative duties and administer grants received from the Texas Water Development Board.

Core Responsibilities of City of Nacogdoches City Secretary

- Develop city commission agenda packets and post agendas
- Attend all city commission meetings, taking minutes and tape recordings of proceedings
- Ensure that all ordinances are published when necessary and codified in a timely manner
- Coordinate all city elections and oversee early voting
- Process public information requests and oversee compliance with all provisions and state statutes governing records management
- Maintain all contracts, deeds, and other official city documents
- Issue permits for charitable solicitation and alcoholic beverage holders
- Maintain current titles, registrations, license plates, and insurance coverage for all city vehicles
- Oversee the city's grants department
- Oversee the municipal court
- Provide administrative support to the city-county emergency management coordinator
- Serve as administrative director of the East Texas (Region I) Water Planning Group

Our department also administers local elections, which keeps us busy for several months a year. You can also throw in open records requests, vehicle insurance and registration duties, and research into old minutes and inquiries from other staff on something we did 20 years ago on any given day!

What are the city's most pressing issues?

Due to the climate of the national economy, it is of the utmost importance that the City of Nacogdoches shows fiscal responsibility in all our operations. We must prove to the taxpayers that we are being good stewards of our budget and not wasting money or natural resources in providing

services. Citizens are making sacrifices in the way they live, and they expect local, state, and national governments to do the same. We need to be pro-active in our efforts to conserve and in the way we address services in the future.

What are your short-term goals for the city secretary's office?

It is a top priority for me to get all departments online with electronic document imaging. We have had records management/document-imaging software for several years, but there are still only a few departments that are using it consistently. I would like to be able to have all departments at least storing long-term documents on it by the end of the year.

I am very fortunate to currently have a young lady, who we were able to hire on a temporary basis through a disaster recovery grant, assist with document imaging. She is going through old records and scanning and inventorying the documents we must keep. She has been able to destroy 35 cubic yards of documents to date from the wastewater plant and my office, which calculates to approximately \$1,100 in cost savings in storage space. The greatest benefit is that the records we have to keep are safe and will be available for

future reference—and no longer subject to what the damp, dark, varmint-prone storage building might have to offer!

What are your long-term goals for the city secretary's office?

After I get the records management program the way I want it, which will probably turn into a long-term goal, I would like to focus on making more historic information available to the public through our Web site. We have a good start with information that we get requests for often, but I would like to take that even further. There is some really fascinating historic information in old minute books and photographs that I would like to make available to the public. I would also like to provide more of the frequently requested information on the Web site, as well.

The more information you can make available to your citizens to educate them on ordinances, laws, and procedures, the better communication you can have. It is also helpful to college students who may be putting a paper together at midnight and can't call my office to request the information. Most information held by a city is public, and I would like to make it as easy as possible for the citizens to receive the information they need in order to better understand the municipal process.

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Small Cities' Corner

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What are your department's greatest opportunities?

I feel my greatest opportunity is to provide the citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions and to learn how the city operates. Most of the time, citizens call me when they want information. Unfortunately, sometimes citizens don't fully understand government as a whole and are expecting us to tell them it is all a big secret. I want our citizens to know that we give access to any information allowed by law, and I am happy to assist them.

There is a process to receive that information, however, that the city must follow. By providing the information requested in an open and responsive manner, I hope I show that the City of Nacogdoches wants our citizens to be more involved and to learn as much as possible about the workings of municipal government.

What are your department's great challenges?

I guess my greatest challenge is making sure that everything that goes out of my office is 100 percent correct, 100 percent of the time. We don't always meet this challenge, but it is our utmost goal. In our rush to meet deadlines and process a lot of information, we don't always have the luxury of that extra set of eyes to review it or make sure the sentence reads exactly how we want it to read. We have a lot of different areas of responsibility, and pretty much everything is documented! There is no worse feeling than knowing that something went out that was incorrect. I want to represent the City of Nacogdoches to the best of my ability, making sure that the history of Nacogdoches' city government is preserved accurately. The city commission, the city manager, and the citizens expect it, and I do not want to disappoint. Perfection is sometimes a luxury!

What makes Nacogdoches unique?

Nacogdoches has such rich history and a small-town feel, yet you can still go to the grocery store or to a movie and see how diverse our city is. We are home to Stephen F. Austin State University, which brings in students and faculty from all over. We may only have them for a few years, but they are a vital part of our city and are a big part of what gives Nacogdoches its charm. Our citizens are constantly changing as students come and go, and we have to stay on our toes to keep up with the changes. The diversity of our SFA students is what gives Nacogdoches its personality—they are a part of our DNA—and we wouldn't be Nacogdoches without them!

What advice can you offer to a city secretary just starting off?

My number one piece of advice would be to get involved in your local municipal clerks chapter or become a member of the Texas Municipal Clerks Association—the benefits are immeasurable. You will find clerks from cities of similar size, type, and geographic area who you can call upon for information and guidance. Next, I recommend enrolling in the Texas Municipal Clerks Certification Program (TMCCP) through the University of North Texas. You will learn so much more in-depth information from the certification program than you can through just a seminar, and it will cover all aspects of the city secretary position. It does take time and dedication, but you—and more importantly, your city—will reap the benefits of the knowledge you will gain. And my third piece of advice would be not to be afraid to ask questions! ★



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