The historic Washburn Tunnel, a half-mile tunnel providing egress from I-10/Highway 225 under the Houston Ship Channel, exhibited signs of underground water leakage and concrete spalling, prompting maintenance concerns. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey, an ACEC Texas member firm provided critical infrastructure repairs and revitalization to keep the tunnel in full operational order for years to come.
Message from the President

TML News

Risk Pool News

Health Pool News

City Lights

Equipping the Next Generation of Leaders

Engaging Young Professionals

Hutto’s Minute with the Mayor

Successful Engagement Strategies from Bryan’s Midtown Plan

Strengthening Neighborhoods in Plano

Arlington’s Budget in Action Campaign Makes Data Relatable

League City Programs Promote Community

Anna’s Community Build Playground Ties Together Events over 100 Years Apart

Texas Electric Deregulation Law Turns 20: A Look Back from the City Perspective

Section 305.027, Government Code, requires legislative advertising to disclose certain information.

A person who knowingly enters into a contract or other agreement to print, publish, or broadcast legislative advertising that does not contain the required information commits a Class A misdemeanor offense.

Texas Town & City contains material which is legislative advertising as defined by law in the state of Texas.

Mr. Bennett Sandlin has entered into an agreement with Publication Printers Corp. for the printing of Texas Town & City magazine. Mr. Sandlin represents the member cities of the Texas Municipal League.

ABOUT THE COVER

Towns and cities throughout Texas are finding creative ways to engage residents and build strong communities

Photo by Melinda Bartram
Senior Marketing Specialist, City of Plano.
The Texas Municipal League exists solely to provide services to Texas cities. Since its formation in 1913, the League’s mission has remained the same: to serve the needs and advocate the interests of its members. Membership in the League is voluntary and is open to any city in Texas. From the original 14 members, TML’s membership has grown to more than 1,150 cities. Over 16,000 mayors, councilmembers, city managers, city attorneys, and department heads are member officials of the League by virtue of their cities’ participation.

The League provides a variety of services to its member cities. One of the principal purposes of the League is to advocate municipal interests at the state and federal levels. Among the thousands of bills introduced during each session of the Texas Legislature are hundreds of bills that would affect cities. The League, working through its Legislative Services Department, attempts to defeat detrimental city-related bills and to facilitate the passage of legislation designed to improve the ability of municipal governments to operate effectively.

The League employs full-time attorneys who are available to provide member cities with information on municipal legal matters. On a daily basis, the legal staff responds to member cities’ written and oral questions on a wide variety of legal matters. The League annually provides a variety of legal seminars to enhance the knowledge and skills of municipal officials in the state. In addition, the League conducts a variety of conferences and training seminars to enhance the knowledge and skills of municipal officials in the state. In addition, the League also publishes a variety of printed materials to assist member cities in performing their duties. The best known of these is the League’s monthly magazine, Texas Town & City. Each issue focuses on a variety of contemporary municipal issues, including survey results to respond to member inquiries.

For additional information on any of these services, contact the Texas Municipal League at 512-231-7400 or visit our website, www.tml.org.

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**TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE**

**TEXAS TOWN & CITY**
Dear Texas City Official,

I am so pleased to be writing the first of my messages to you this year as your TML President. I enjoyed seeing so many of you at the conference in San Antonio, and I look forward to meeting many more of you in the year to come.

This issue of *Texas Town & City* is devoted to community engagement. A tight-knit sense of community is something I know a lot about—my town of Staples, population 267, was a close-knit community that incorporated just over a decade ago. Nearly everyone knows everyone, and it’s been a pleasure helping my friends and neighbors transition from an unincorporated community to an official Texas city! I’ve been the only mayor, and building that sense of community with the help of the League has motivated me all the way to my current position of service to you within TML.

Inside this issue, you’ll find articles about neighborhood engagement, budget campaigns, community-built playgrounds, and more. These are all examples of how Texas communities come in different shapes, needs and sizes, and how the League has something to offer each of them.

Please don’t hesitate to call on me in the year ahead to visit if your community needs assistance from the League. I stand ready, along with staff, to help you in any way we can.

Eddie Daffern, CMO
Mayor
City of Staples
TML President
LILA MAY BANKS COCKRELL
January 19, 1922 - August 29, 2019

Lila Cockrell, the first woman president of the Texas Municipal League and San Antonio’s first woman mayor, passed away on August 29. Cockrell served as the League’s president from 1975 to 1976, and for a decade on the San Antonio City Council. She was sworn in as the City’s first female mayor pro tem in 1969, elected the first female mayor in 1975 serving until 1981, then again from 1989 to 1991.

Cockrell devoted her life to public service, serving on municipal boards and commissions, and as president of the San Antonio Parks Foundation for 15 years. The Lila Cockrell Theatre, located along the San Antonio River in the heart of downtown, is named in her honor.

In describing her influence in San Antonio, Mayor Ron Nirenberg said “If there were a Mount Rushmore for our city, Lila Cockrell would be on it. She was a towering example of civic engagement at its finest. Her quiet but powerful service-oriented activism throughout her life was truly an inspiration to all who care about San Antonio and admire true leadership.”

Cockrell’s presence will be missed, but her legacy will continue to inspire her beloved City of San Antonio and the entire State.

Record-Setting TML Annual Conference in San Antonio

The October 9-11 Texas Municipal League Annual Conference and Exhibition in San Antonio was the highest attended conference in the League’s 107-year history. The 3,249 attendees and 1,950 exhibitor staff broke all past conference attendance records.

TML thanks the City of San Antonio for their support and hospitality, our sponsors and exhibitors for their commitment to Texas cities, the conference speakers who shared their time and expertise, and our city officials who make TML an outstanding organization.

December Public Funds Investment Act Training in League City

The Public Funds Investment Act (PFIA) requires investment officers, treasurers, and chief financial officers (if the treasurer is not the CFO) to receive 10 hours of training within 12 months of taking office, and to renew every two years with an additional eight hours of instruction. Is your city in compliance? Join TML in League City on December 5-6 for the next PFIA Workshop. This session meets the training requirements under state law, and is designed for elected and appointed officials at all experience levels and from all-size cities. Register at www.tmlpfia.org.

A Guide to Becoming a City Official

Effective service as an elected official requires dedication, knowledge, and a substantial time commitment. A Guide to Becoming a City Official will familiarize candidates with the responsibilities of city elected office. Download your PDF copy at www.tml.org/183/Publications.
Your Crowning Professional Achievement

Are you on track to earn your Certified Municipal Official (CMO) or another Texas Municipal League Institute (TMLI) award designation this year? If you need more credits to earn your designation, look for upcoming offerings on the TML training calendar or contact us at tmli@tml.org. Remember that requests for 2019 CEUs must be received no later than January 10 to be included in the TMLI brochure, the TML-TAMCC Elected Officials’ Conference final program, and Texas Town & City magazine.

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“I wish I had done this a long time ago!” A First Responder Client
Cybersecurity Risks and Ransomware Threats on the Rise

Headlines like the one above used to be plots for movie thrillers. Now they are in the news nearly every day if the damage is large enough to warrant reporting. In fact, most attacks are not publicized. Victims usually only communicate with law enforcement and - if they have coverage - their liability carriers.

According to Cisco, the rate of ransomware attacks is increasing 350% annually. Damage from these attacks totaled $325 million in 2015 and is expected to rise to $11.5 billion in 2019. In fact, in July, 2019, Governor John Bel Edwards of Louisiana declared a state of emergency following a series of attacks, a threat he described as “ongoing.” The declaration allowed greater state and federal resources to be deployed.

A ransomware attack affecting 22 local government entities here in Texas occurred this summer, with federal and state authorities leading a coordinated law enforcement, assessment, and remediation response to the affected entities.

What Is Ransomware?

Hackers will encrypt an organization’s data so it cannot be accessed, then hold the key to decryption for ransom. Payment is usually demanded in Bitcoin, an electronic currency popular in pop culture (think of the terms ‘blockchain’ and ‘cryptocurrency’) and with criminals for the ability to transfer funds anonymously, secretly, and untraceably. Worse, of those who pay the ransom, a reported 17% never recover their data.

How Does It Happen?

While direct assaults on computer networks do happen, more losses occur through simpler means, such as email with an attachment containing a malicious virus or a link to an outside website. It may also occur if the user downloads infected material from a compromised website.

Emails can be sent impersonating an address the sender doesn’t own (spoofing) to ask the recipient to provide private information (phishing). There is no malicious code in most of these emails, merely a sentence or two intended to create a sense of urgency in the reader and cloud judgment when suspicious vigilance should be employed.
The reader is asked to click a link or open an attachment, through which access can be established. Once the attacker has access, he or she will attempt to take over as much of the system as can be accessed.

**What Can Be Done?**

Investing in technology and user training are the first steps to take. Non-technical users can be easily trained to spot the red flags phishing messages typically raise. House Bill 3834, which became law in June, creates a requirement that local government employees and officials who have access to a computer system take annual cybersecurity training through a program certified by the Department of Information Resources. While this bill is a good start, there is no reason to exclude any email user from training, as any email user can be targeted. In fact, users with minimal usage can pose the greatest risk due to a lack of technology savviness. With an hour’s education from a qualified provider, and a little reinforcement through practical testing, most users will be able to recognize suspicious messages and deal with them appropriately (notifying the IT department and deleting the message is usually best).

However, user training is not the cure. IT staff should be current on cyber threats and best practices for thwarting them. These include the use of firewalls, encrypted communication, frequent scanning of networks and file systems with updated anti-virus/anti-malware, frequent backups, intrusion testing, and ensuring all software and firmware is regularly updated or retired if upgrade is not possible.

The Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) has several suggestions and best practices related to combatting ransomware and other schemes. In addition, DIR has procured preferential pricing on shared technology services available to all local governments in Texas.

If your local government’s property or liability coverage is provided by TMLIRP, the Pool has a number of resources available to manage this risk as well as resources should your entity experience a breach or ransomware attack, including trained breach coaches, legal representation, preferential remediation services, and coordinated notification and credit monitoring services for affected customers.

As the threats increase in scope and frequency while becoming harder to detect, knowledge and vigilance must keep pace. Understanding what your local government will do in the event of a cyber incident is the first step toward successful recovery.

5. https://www.comparitech.com/antivirus/ransomware-statistics
Introducing TML Well: Supporting Well-Being in the Workplace

Approximately 156 million full-time employees in the United States spend most of their waking hours at work. This opens the door for workplace wellness programs to reach individuals who might not otherwise be exposed to health promotion programs.

Over the years, research has also shown that supporting well-being in the workplace has a positive impact on staff and their organizations. Benefits include lower absenteeism and presentism and improved productivity.

There’s further evidence that workplace wellness programs can help lower healthcare costs:

• A recent survey reports that more than 60% of employers say workplace wellness programs cut their organizations' health care costs.
• The same report states that prescription drug costs decreased by 10 percent.
• There’s also an overall decrease in healthcare services utilization, which reduces the healthcare cost burden.

Introducing a new wellness program: TML Well

“The bottom line is that wellness can improve your company culture and health,” says TML Health Executive Director Jennifer Hoff. “As we developed the TML Well program, we knew it needed to include programs that support a healthy workplace culture in addition to the wellbeing of your employees. Worksite wellness is a team sport. You have to keep wellness at the forefront for your employees, or they’ll have a hard time maintaining their progress.”
The goal of any wellness program should be to affect clinically meaningful and long-lasting improvements in employees’ weight management, physical activity, and overall health, among other results. With that as a guiding principle, the TML Well program was designed to:

- Be evidence-based and cost-efficient
- Be turnkey and easy to use for employers
- Be a multi-year, comprehensive program
- Engage members to take care of their health before they get sick
- Provide a $150 cash or prize incentive to each employee and spouse

**A robust program of partnerships**

TML Well partnered with three vendors for a customized solution: Navigate, Catapult, and Naturally Slim. These partnerships are key to making the program fun and effective. Navigate provides the technology platform and online programming for TML Well. The online portal includes a variety of personal and group challenges, the ability for members to sync their devices to the program, reporting, and incentive administration.

Undiagnosed and untreated chronic disease leads to serious complications, avoidable medical costs, and extended disability. Yet, most people do not have the recommended screenings because they:

- Feel it’s time-consuming
- Don’t have a primary care provider
- Don’t think about it
- Have a fear of doctors or needles

That’s where onsite screenings can help. Evidence-based preventive screenings serve as tools to help catch “silent” killers such as high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, and pre-diabetes.

TML Well, in partnership with Catapult, will provide onsite preventive screenings to our groups with a minimum of 25 screening per site. With Catapult, employees can get lab-accurate results with a single finger stick and have an immediate video consultation with a nurse practitioner to discuss their results, get counseling on any issues identified, and be referred to a local physician if necessary.

**Incentives help boost engagement**

Organizations that offer rewards of more than $100 report employee participation rates of 51 percent, which compares to 36 percent participation for those with smaller rewards. Julie Sullivan, Business Process Manager for TML Health notes, “While we know incentives are effective at increasing program engagement, we also know they’re not an end-all, be-all solution. It’s just as important to offer a rich, well-designed program that can boost employee morale and participation rates.”

TML Well seeks to cover the bases by offering challenges and resources to guide employees on their personal journeys. The program currently offers more than 30 personal challenges for stress, finances, sleep, activity, nutrition, and more. Some are as short as two weeks and others, such as “Money Life,” are six weeks.

**Good health leads to better business**

The United States Chamber of Commerce reported that more than 60 percent of employers surveyed said that workplace wellness programs reduced their organizations’ healthcare costs. Employer respondents also reported an overall decrease in healthcare service utilization, which, in turn, lowered the healthcare cost burden.

An effective workplace wellness strategy can help improve the health and productivity of an organization’s workforce, something all public entities need to maintain great service to the community even when budgets are tight.


**About TML Health Benefits Pool**

TML Health Benefits Pool serves the healthcare needs of political subdivisions in Texas. They understand the impact of today’s economy and the challenges confronting the members they serve. Now more than ever, they seek to uphold their mission statement: Bringing members together to provide quality healthcare benefits for employees and families at an exceptional value. ★
Bay City’s “We Saw You” Awards

Bay City gives out “We Saw You” Awards every month to recognize City employees who go above and beyond their job duties to help others in their workplace or community. Residents can nominate City employees for outstanding assistance or customer service by submitting a form either online or at city hall. It’s just one way that Bay City goes the extra mile to engage its residents and employees in city business.

Cleveland Hosts Back to School Spectacular

The City of Cleveland partners every year with community organizations and businesses to host a Back to School Spectacular for children from kindergarten through fifth grade. The event provides children with a backpack and the supplies they need to start the school year at no cost. School supplies are donated by local businesses, corporations, churches, and other organizations. This year’s event drew more than 700 children who filled their backpacks with pencils, crayons, folders, composition books, spiral binders, and more while enjoying friends, activities, and entertainment. It’s Cleveland’s way of helping parents and children get ready for a rewarding school year.

Special Abilities Family Fun Event in Kilgore

The City of Kilgore Fire Department recently hosted a Special Abilities Family Fun Event (SAFFE) day, celebrating children and adults with special needs and their families. Now in its eighth year, the event drew more than 700 people and stretched out along several blocks of Commerce Street in downtown Kilgore. SAFFE day featured carnival-style games, a dunk tank, miniature firetruck rides, remote control trucks, and educational booths. The day was rewarding for all of the firefighters, city employees, volunteers, donors, and families who participated.

In San Marcos, Not Every Hero Wears a Cape

In honor of Fire Prevention Week, the City of San Marcos Fire Department (SMFD) hosted its annual Open House in October at Station #4. The public was invited to attend this free event. This year’s cam-
Campaign, “Not Every Hero Wears a Cape. Plan and Practice Your Escape,” highlighted the importance of a timely and safe fire escape plan.

“Situational awareness is a skill people need to use wherever they go,” said Chief Les Stephens. “No matter where you are, look for available exits. If the alarm system sounds, take it seriously and exit the building immediately.”

Local organizations including the San Marcos Police Department, the Interlocal Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team, Hays County and San Marcos Animal Services, San Marcos/Hays County EMS, and Pink Heals hosted tables at the event. Attendees enjoyed fire truck rides, a fire-safety clown show, Hays Unmanned Robotics Team demonstrations, big rescue trucks, and other fun and educational activities. Free hotdogs, chips, drinks and cookies were provided by Sam’s Club, the event sponsor.

Grapevine Library Is Awarded Sensory Certification

The Grapevine Public Library received official certification through KultureCity to become the first sensory inclusive library in Texas. Through its sensory awareness programs, the Library is improving its ability to assist and accommodate visitors with sensory needs.

To earn certification, the Library staff was trained on how to recognize library visitors with sensory needs like autism, dementia, anxiety, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, Down’s syndrome, post-traumatic stress disorder, and cerebral palsy. They offer sensory bags filled with items such as noise-canceling headphones, fidget toys, a communication card, and weighted blankets at the circulation desk, and provide signage and modifications to create a more accepting and comfortable environment for individuals with sensory needs.

For information about KultureCity and the Library’s social story that helps prepare individuals for their visit, go to http://library.grapevinetexas.gov/1647/Sensory-Awareness.

Allen Earns National Accreditation in Parks and Recreation

The City of Allen joins the ranks of elite park and recreation agencies across the country by earning accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). This distinguished accomplishment was awarded during the 2019 NRPA Annual Conference in Baltimore, Maryland.

CAPRA accreditation is the only national accreditation for park and recreation agencies, and is a measure of an agency’s overall quality of operation, management and service to the community. This mark of distinction indicates that an agency has met rigorous standards related to the management and administration of lands, facilities, resources, programs, safety and services.

As part of the accreditation process, Allen Parks and Recreation had to demonstrate compliance with 151 recognized standards and document all policies and procedures. Often the process helps identify efficiencies and heighten areas of accountability, all of which translate into higher quality service and operation to benefit the community.

“This accreditation once again puts Allen on the national stage and affirms the talent and professionalism of our many valued employees,” said Assistant City Manager Tim Dentler, who served as Allen’s Parks and Recreation Director until his promotion in August. “We couldn’t have accomplished this without the support from our City leadership, elected officials, and the entire Allen community.”

For more information about CAPRA accreditation, visit www.nrpa.org/CAPRA.

For information about KultureCity and the Library’s social story that helps prepare individuals for their visit, go to http://library.grapevinetexas.gov/1647/Sensory-Awareness.
When we look at our youth today, in particular those aged 14-18, what do we see? Do we see lawyers, teachers, professional athletes, or celebrities? How about plumbers, electricians, and auto repair technicians?

In Kyle, we see future leaders. We see students excited about serving their communities. We see possibility. These reasons are why having a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is so important.

Many young people are disillusioned with government, but much of their angst is directed toward federal and state government. By joining a youth council, they have the opportunity to see first-hand how local government operates and why it’s so important for our society to have well-functioning municipal governments.

What happens at the local level has the most important and profound impact on our daily lives. The taxes we pay, the policies under which our elected officials govern, and the ordinances under which we live are determined by local leaders.

The Kyle Area Youth Advisory Council (KAYAC), formed six years ago, brings our city the youth perspective. Our members, all local residents of Kyle or neighboring Buda, are students at Hays Consolidated Independent School District. They range in age from 14-18 and many remain with KAYAC for three to four years of their high school career.

As part of their experience with the organization, which was charted and is still funded by the Kyle City Council, KAYAC students gain insight into the day-to-day operations of city government. They attend Council meetings, regularly meet with City staff and elected officials, and work on a capstone project with a community-minded goal. Our group also volunteers for several City-sponsored events throughout the year. At the end of the school year, KAYAC leaders make a presentation to Council.

In early February 2020, the KAYAC is hosting the Texas Youth Advisory Commission (YAC) Summit, which is sponsored by the Texas Municipal League (TML). Our members are beyond excited! They are taking an active role in the planning and implementation of the event, from guest speakers to sponsors to swag and more. The energy in the room when they meet is tangible. They aim to set the bar high for an excellent YAC Summit.

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Many YACs across the state offer similar opportunities to youth. The value of having a YAC is incalculable. With this foundation in service, along with a clearer understanding of
governance, these students will carry with them into adulthood the true mission of leadership and community.

By giving youth a chance to be part of or contribute to decision making, or at the very least, be heard and recognized by city leaders, it builds their confidence — not only in their personal abilities such as public speaking, leadership, and teamwork, but also in their faith in our system of democracy.

Every community can benefit from having a youth council and not just for the volunteer hours we all desire. The true benefit is in developing young minds to learn, question, think critically, and get involved. That involvement shouldn’t only stem from when they don’t agree with something enacted by a city council, county commission, or school board. That involvement should grow out of an understanding of how cities, boards, and commissions function and their impact on residents.

In Kyle, our hope is that students who become more aware of the world around them and take part in shaping it will be primed for leadership and public service in the future.

Our special guests are David Flood and Jonathan Jones, both seasoned motivational speakers.

The weekend plans also include an optional Friday night Pie Social with a disc jockey and a variety of pies, plus games and chances to bond with other YACs. On Saturday, attendees will enjoy a fun evening at a local entertainment facility that offers bowling, an arcade, and movies. And, you guessed it, pizza pie.

Our youth council members are diligently planning a summit that we believe will be a milestone in its own right among YAC Summits in Texas. Make plans now to join us on February 1-2, 2020 in Kyle. More information on the YAC Summit can be found at www.yacsummit.org.

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20th Annual Texas Youth Advisory Commission Summit

February 1-2, 2020 • Kyle, Texas

The 2020 YAC Summit, which will be held in Kyle, the Pie Capital of Texas®, marks the 20th year of this beloved TML event. The City could not be happier or prouder to host the celebration of this important milestone, which will be held February 1-2, 2020 at the Performing Arts Center in Kyle.

In homage to the year, and the anniversary, our theme is “Envision 2020: Focus on your Future.”

Each guest speaker and session track will coincide with that theme. With concurrent and large session topics including common sense, leadership, social skills, and career success, KAYAC aims to provide attendees with useful, timely, and practical information to help them in their journeys and future plans.
EQUIPPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

By Megan Askiainen, Solutions Architect, CivicClerk

There’s a shift taking place in local government administration across the nation. The change is in response to the mass retirement of Baby Boomers which is impacting towns and cities across the country. As a result, local governments are seeing a demographic shift in public leadership from experienced and established Baby Boomers to Millennials. With more Millennials running for office, the composition of city councils is starting to change from retired community members to younger, tech-savvy citizens. The expectations of these younger council members are for greater access to technology, more standard transparency, and higher levels of administrative efficiency. To achieve these expectations and adapt to the demographic shift in leadership, communities must be prepared to equip the next generation of leadership with the tools and resources they want and need to be productive.

Update Your Technology

According to the Society for Human Resource Managers, Millennials, a demographic segment that will account for 46 percent of the workforce by 2020, prefer the use of cutting-edge technology, are motivated to make a difference in their community, and aim to be successful in their careers. With such goals propelling public sector Millennials forward, local governments can enable their success by providing them with the types of enterprise mobility solutions that will allow them to work collaboratively and productively.

Younger generations are not just clocking in at the office and going home. They are continually engaged with work, checking emails and completing tasks at the office, at home, on weekends, from a desktop, a tablet, and a smartphone. Local governments should enable such efficiency and attentiveness by ensuring critical software systems are cloud-based and accessible from any device.

Enable Digital Self-Sufficiency

Millennials are often referred to as the “I will find it right now,” generation. Growing up with smartphones in their hands, they are the generation that turned Google into a verb and can’t sit still without checking in on social media or finding an answer as soon as a question passes someone’s lips. Millennials want to obtain the information they seek themselves, anytime from any device. This behavior defines them as consumers, citizens, employees, and civic leaders.

Local governments should give Millennials the tools they need to self-service their job functions, act collaboratively, and immediately obtain information. Systems should include online calendar scheduling tools, on-demand video recordings of local meetings and council sessions, and the ability to search online for transparency documents.

Show Them the Stats

Millennials are data-minded and driven by statistics. Ensure your administration has tools in place to aggregate data that can be analyzed and used to inform decisions. Millennials, especially elected officials and administrative staff, will want everything from citizen survey data to digital solution usage, to regional and national benchmarks, to internal efficiency statistics. Be prepared to explain how many citizens are searching for marriage licenses on your local government website each month, how many citizens want to see an additional dog park built in your community, and how long it takes staff to respond to the average transparency request.

Enable Them to Be Accountable

Millennials are goal-minded. They want to be recognized for their accomplishments, but only because they want to continually set and reach new goals. Have a system in place that provides transparency into your council’s goals and ensures all participants can actively monitor progress toward those goals.

Help Them Be Lifelong Learners

Millennials never want to quit learning. Perhaps this stems from their “Let me Google it” mindset, or maybe it is fueled by their desire to improve and achieve new levels of success. Millennials will feel most comfortable and supported as a member of your team if they are provided with on-demand training resources and educational opportunities.

Conclusion

Millennials are taking over the public and private sectors, and they have the natural inclination and drive to be successful. By accommodating their desire to leverage data and technology to be efficient and make informed decisions, you can give the Millennials making an impact in your town or city the ability to lead your community to new heights. ★
Serving as an elected city official can be one of the most rewarding areas of all public service. It can also be challenging.

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January 10, 2020
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Modern day living requires an abundance of behind-the-scenes activities to ensure the carefree lifestyle enjoyed by city-dwellers and suburban citizens. A peek behind the curtain at the infrastructure involved in the construction industry reveals an entire subdivision of specialists dedicated to ensuring public safety through the implementation of building codes. The professionals in this subdivision, referred to as building code official professionals, in many ways serve as the backbone to safe and comfortable community living.

Building code official professionals have the essential function of confirming safe construction practices for structures, including commercial and residential buildings. Without their guidance and expertise, cities would not be able to guarantee safe access to public or even private spaces. Given this important role, it is a concern to learn of the industry’s latest challenge: a core employee demographic that is aging out of the profession.

The majority of these professionals are approaching retirement age. A 2014 study performed by the National Institute of Building Sciences determined that 82 percent of the existing code enforcement workforce intended on retiring within 15 years. Conversely, only 3.4 percent of the population for this profession was under the age of 35. In order to maintain a robust workforce, the age gap in this industry must be reconciled. To get ahead of the potential age gap crisis, organizations related to the industry are targeting a younger audience in their recruitment efforts.

Building Officials Association of Texas (BOAT) hosted its Third Annual Career Development Day in Irving last May. As part of the organization’s targeted outreach, they invited students from MacArthur High School’s Construction Technology Program to attend. The event included educational sessions about the industry, career discussions, as well as networking opportunities and a round table discussion.
"We were pleased to see that so many students joined us for career day," said Mike Olson, Director of Community Development, City of McGregor, and BOAT president. "The event was designed to attract new talent by providing education opportunities and fostering professional networking interactions with industry leaders. It's exciting to see the young students taking advantage of these opportunities."

"We are hopeful that continued outreach efforts, such as BOAT's recent Career Development Day, will result in the recruitment of young professionals in this rewarding industry," said Van Tran, Vice President for Bureau Veritas. "BOAT has artillery of amazing benefits that young professionals are looking for. The only thing standing between our industry and the young professionals is engagement."

For more information about professional building code official career opportunities, visit www.boatx.org. ★

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**Figure 1: Age of Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 to 24</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 or older</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Figure 2: Plans to Leave the Building Regulatory profession**

- Less than 5 years: 0%
- 5 to 15 years: 31%
- 16 to 25 years: 82%
- 26 to 35 years: 51%
- 36 to 45 years: 14%
- 46 years or more: 0%

Graph showing results of national study conducted by the National Institute of Building Sciences in 2014, which included 3,850 participants with representation in all 50 states.

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LEGAL ★ Q&A

By Scott Houston
TML Deputy Executive Director
and General Counsel

Q What is the current state of building codes for Texas cities?

A Prior to 2001, Texas had no statewide standards for any residential or commercial buildings constructed within a city. Each city chose what, if any, building code(s) to adopt for construction in the city limits, and each city amended its code to meet local concerns. The most common codes were the Uniform Building Codes and the Southern Standard Building Code.

In 2001, the Texas legislature began enacting a series of laws to adopt the International family of codes for the state. Currently, cities that choose to adopt and enforce building codes should normally be operating under: (1) the International Residential Code (IRC) for residential construction; (2) the National Electrical Code (NEC) for electrical construction in both residential and commercial construction; and (3) the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and the International Building Code (IBC) for all construction other than single-family residential. With regard to plumbing codes, a city may be operating under the plumbing provisions of the IRC and/or either the plumbing provisions of the Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC) or International Plumbing Code (IPC).

Q What did the evolution of the International Code Council model code adoptions look like?

A The following is a brief synopsis of the evolution of the International Building Codes in Texas:

• In 2001, at the behest of homebuilders, the Texas Legislature adopted S.B. 365, now codified at § 214.211 et seq. of the Texas Local Government Code. S.B. 365 adopted the IRC and the NEC as the standard building codes for residential construction in Texas cities starting January 1, 2002. Under the statute, cities are authorized to make any amendments to these codes to meet local concerns, regardless of whether the amendments are “less stringent” than the original code provisions. See Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. No. GA-0297 (2005).

• In 2001, the legislature also adopted S.B. 5, which is now codified at § 388.003 of the Texas Health and Safety Code. S.B. 5 adopted the Energy Efficiency Chapter of the IRC for single-family residential construction and the IECC for all other residential, commercial, and industrial construction. The bill became effective on September 1, 2001, and cities were required to establish procedures for the administration and enforcement of the codes by that date. Under this law as well, cities are authorized to make amendments to the codes to meet local concerns. With regard to the energy codes, however, local amendments may not result in less stringent energy efficiency requirements in nonattainment areas and in affected counties than the energy efficiency chapter of the IRC or IECC. However, legislation in 2015 authorized an “alternate compliance path for residential construction” (see below). A “nonattainment” area is one that has failed to meet federal standards for ambient air quality. The major metropolitan areas of the state are all in nonattainment status. An “affected county” is one listed in state law that is typically surrounding a nonattainment area. See Tex. Health and Safety Code § 386.001.

(Editor’s note: This is the first part of a two-part Q&A on building codes. The second part will appear in the December 2019 edition of Texas Town & City.)
Finally in 2001, the legislature adopted H.B. 217, which is now codified at § 1301.255 of the Texas Occupations Code (the plumbing license law). The section requires the Texas Board of Plumbing Examiners to adopt the UPC and the IPC. Currently, the board has adopted the 2012 editions of those codes. 22 T.A.C. § 367.2(a). Section 1301.255(d) provides that a city may amend any provisions of a plumbing code to conform to local concerns that do not substantially vary from board rules or other rules of this state. (Note that plumbing installed under a plumbing code must be inspected by a licensed plumbing inspector who is paid directly by the city. Tex. Occ. Code § 1301.255(e)).

The attorney general, in 2002, opined on the relationship between S.B. 365 (adopting the International Residential Code, which contains plumbing provisions) and H.B. 217 (adopting separate plumbing codes). The attorney general concluded that the two bills could be harmonized, and opined that “the International Residential Code is the uniform residential building code for municipalities in this state, and its plumbing provisions are the uniform plumbing code for residential construction,” and that cities may choose either the UPC or the IPC to govern nonresidential plumbing. Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. No. JC-0453 (2002).

In 2003, S.B. 283 was passed and requires any city that adopts a building code, other than the IRC, to adopt and enforce either prescriptive provisions for the rehabilitation of buildings or the rehabilitation code that accompanies the city’s building code. This bill was an anomaly related to one city, and shouldn’t be applicable to most cities. The bill is codified at § 214.215 et seq. of the Texas Local Government Code.

In 2003, H.B. 730 was passed and created the Texas Residential Construction Commission. The purpose of the bill was to create standards for home buyer complaints against builders. The bill used the IRC as the standard for those complaints. However, the bill did not affect city authority or impose any additional requirements on cities. (In 2009, the commission was abolished, and H.B. 2833 granted 253 counties limited enforcement authority relating to building codes.)

In 2005, S.B. 1458 was passed and provides that: (1) the IBC is adopted as the municipal building code in Texas for commercial and multi-family construction; (2) a city that has adopted a more stringent commercial building code before January 1, 2006, is not required to repeal that code and may adopt future editions of that code; and (3) the National Electrical Code applies to all commercial buildings in a city for which construction begins on or after January 1, 2006, and to any alteration, remodeling, enlargement, or repair of those commercial buildings. Again, nothing in the bill prohibits a city from adopting local amendments to the IBC or NEC.

In 2007, H.B. 3693 authorized the State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) to – by administrative rule – adopt and substitute the energy efficiency provisions of the latest published editions of the IRC or the IECC for residential or commercial energy efficiency and air quality for the previously-adopted 2001 version. SECO did so, and the 2015 energy code provisions are now adopted by SECO rule. 34 T.A.C. § 19.53.

In 2011, H.B. 51 made minor modifications to the Health and Safety Code provisions relating to SECO energy
In 2014, pursuant to Texas Occupations Code Section 1305.101(a), the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation adopted the 2017 version of the NEC. Cities are still authorized to make amendments to the NEC, so long as the amendments achieve similar objectives and safety.

In 2015, H.B. 1736 made various changes related to energy efficiency standards. It provides that: (1) on September 1, 2016, the energy efficiency chapter of the International Residential Code, as it existed on May 1, 2015, is adopted as the energy code in this state for single-family residential construction; (2) on or after September 1, 2021, the State Energy Conservation Office (SECO) may adopt and substitute for that energy code the latest published edition of the energy efficiency chapter of the International Residential Code (IRC), based on written findings on the stringency of the chapter submitted by the Texas A&M Energy Systems Laboratory; (3) SECO may not adopt an edition of the code more often than once every six years and by rule shall establish an effective date for an adopted edition that is not earlier than nine months after the date of adoption; and (4) SECO may adopt and substitute for the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC), which applies to all other residential, commercial, and industrial construction, the latest published edition of the IECC, based on written findings on the stringency of the edition submitted by the laboratory, and SECO by rule shall establish an effective date for an adopted edition that is not earlier than nine months after the date of adoption.

In addition, the bill added an “Energy Rating Index Compliance Alternative” or “subsequent alternative compliance path” to measure compliance for single-family residential construction. The bill was brought forth by homebuilders who felt the energy efficiency standards in the code were too costly. The optional compliance paths expire September 1, 2025, and a city located in a nonattainment area or in an affected county may establish procedures to adopt local amendments to them.

In 2019, H.B. 2858 was passed and provides that: (1) to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code, as it existed on May 1, 2019, is adopted as the municipal swimming pool and spa code in this state; (2) the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code applies to all construction, alteration, remodeling, enlargement, and repair of swimming pools and spas in a city that elects to regulate pools or spas, including by requiring fencing under current state law; (3) a city may establish procedures for the adoption of local amendments to the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code and the administration and enforcement of the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code; and (4) a city may review and adopt amendments made by the International Code Council to the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code after May 1, 2019.

What does all of the above mean in plain English? It means that, currently, cities that choose to adopt and enforce building codes should be operating under: (1) the IRC (and possible alternative energy compliance paths) and NEC for residential construction (a city could adopt a plumbing code for residential construction, but most rely on the plumbing provisions of the IRC instead); (2) the NEC, IECC, IBC, and a Texas Board of Plumbers adopted plumbing code for all construction other than single-family residential; and (3) if the city adopts a building code other than the IRC, either prescriptive provisions for the rehabilitation of buildings or the rehabilitation code that accompanies the city’s building code.

Q Is a city required to take steps to administer and enforce building codes?

A Maybe. While the enforcement of building codes is a core function for many cities, others choose not to enforce building codes and/or do not have the resources to do so.

Whether to do so is likely better defined as a policy issue instead of a legal one. Thus, TML has advised its member cities lacking the resources to enforce building codes that: (1) no action is required on their part; or (2) they may adopt the codes, but may usually delete provisions that require the city to issue a permit or perform an inspection. This arrangement appears to comply with the requirements of state law, and places the burden of compliance on the builder.

Plumbing inspection might be one exception to the above. A city with a...
population of more than 5,000 must adopt a plumbing code. Tex. Occ. Code § 1301.551(a). A city of less than 5,000 may, but is not required to, do so. Tex. Occ. Code § 1301.551(b). Any city that has adopted a plumbing code is required to employ or contract with a plumbing inspector and to inspect plumbing installed in the city. Tex. Occ. Code § 1301.255(e).

In other words, adoption of a plumbing code requires a city to hire or contract with a plumbing inspector and enforce the code. See Tex. Occ. Code § 1301.255(e). However, the attorney general has stated that “not every political subdivision in the state is required by the plumbing licensing law to adopt a plumbing code,” and “[c]ities of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants may, but are not required, to adopt a plumbing code pursuant to the plumbing licensing law.” Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. No. JC-0453 (2002).

In spite of the plumbing license law, not inspecting may be the only option for many cities. This means that some smaller cities may choose not to adopt a plumbing code, which imposes a statutory inspection requirement. Whether the reasons are economic, safety-related, or climate-specific, Texas cities arguably have the right to decide how, when, and if to enforce building codes.

Q Must a city adopt a building code by ordinance to enforce it?

A Yes. While state law generally “adopts” for the state certain codes, and some state agencies have the power to adopt certain codes, a city arguably can’t enforce those codes without an ordinance in place.

In 2001, the Texas Legislature adopted S.B. 365, now codified as Sections 214.211 - 214.214 of the Texas Local Government Code. S.B. 365 adopted the IRC as a municipal building code for residential construction in Texas cities starting January 1, 2002. The language of Section 214.212(a) provides that:

“It is protect the public health, safety, and welfare, the International Residential Code, as it existed on May 1, 2001, is adopted as a municipal residential building code in this state.

(Emphasis added.) More importantly, Subsection (b) provides that “the International Residential Code applies to all construction, alteration, remod-
eling, enlargement, and repair of residential structures in a municipality."

Also in 2001, the legislature adopted H.B. 217, now codified in chapter 1301 of the Texas Occupations Code. Section 1301.551 provides that:

(a) A municipality with more than 5,000 inhabitants shall regulate by ordinance or bylaw the material, construction, alteration, and inspection of any pipe, faucet, tank, valve, water heater, or other fixture by or through which a supply of water, gas, or sewage is used or carried.

(b) Any other municipality may regulate by ordinance or bylaw the matters described by Subsection (a).

(Emphasis added.) The language above is one of the few clear mandates related to cities and building code enforcement.

In 2006, the legislature adopted S.B. 1458, now generally codified as Section 214.216 of the Local Government Code. S.B. 1458 adopted the IBC as a municipal building code for commercial construction in Texas cities starting on January 1, 2006. The language of Section 214.216(a) provides that

\[ \text{(a) Single-family residential construction. Effective September 1, 2016, the energy efficiency chapter of the International Residential Code, as it existed on May 1, 2015, and as supplemented by Health and Safety Code, §388.003(i) and (j), is adopted as the energy code for use in this state for single-family residential construction as it is defined in Health and Safety Code, §388.002(12).} \]

(b) All other residential, commercial, and industrial construction. Effective November 1, 2016, the International Energy Conservation Code, as it existed on May 1, 2015, is adopted as the energy code for use in this state for all residential, commercial, and industrial construction that is not single-family residential construction under subsection (a) of this section.

(Emphasis added.) The language is somewhat ambiguous, but most would agree that the cited international codes are "the" codes for Texas.

Note that this language is different from the county building code provisions in Local Government Code Section 233.153(a). That provision provides that "[n]ew residential construction of a single-family house or duplex in the unincorporated area of a county to which this subchapter applies shall conform to the version of the International Residential Code published as of May 1, 2008, or the version of the International Residential Code that is applicable in the county seat of that county." (Emphasis added.)

Based on all of the above, the best reading of Local Government Code Chapter 214 and Health and Safety Code Chapter 388 is that any structure built within a city must comply with the requirements of the International Codes. (So, for example, a city ordinance providing that no code exists in the city limits would arguably have no effect.)

But the above may be a purely academic analysis. The real issue is not whether the codes apply, but rather how violations are enforced. Some cities either choose not to enforce building codes and/or do not have the resources to do so. Practically speaking, this is the only option for many cities.

On the other hand, many cities have an ordinance that formally adopts the codes, with or without local amendments. Those cities do so to avail themselves of: (1) the ability to issue and enforce notices of violation for a violation of a code provision; and (2) to determine which provisions of the code may need modification to fit the city’s needs.

The conclusion that a city must adopt a building code by ordinance to enforce it is bolstered by SECO’s website, which provides that “local jurisdictions are responsible for building energy code implementation and enforcement.”
TCAP IS THANKFUL

For the Great State of Texas we are blessed to call home.

For Thomas Edison, whose light bulb changed our lives forever.

For our member cities who count on us to keep the lights on and save tax dollars.
MINUTE WITH THE MAYOR

Although every regularly scheduled City Council meeting in Hutto is streamed live on the website and posted almost immediately, many residents do not have time to attend, or to watch a meeting that sometimes lasts past midnight. So, to keep the citizens of Hutto informed of trending issues discussed at the Council meetings, Mayor Doug Gaul wakes up very early on the Friday following a Council meeting and heads to City Hall, goes into a small studio, faces bright lights, and reads from an iPad teleprompter to appear on a one-minute wrap up video called “Minute With The Mayor” to cover the major actions taken the night before.

The video production came to life in May 2019 and has been the talk of the town ever since. After each episode with the Mayor, the City usually receives numerous comments from residents watching on Facebook. The comments show the spot is successful in highlighting important issues with eye-catching graphics, closed-captioning, and a brief format. The comments on the videos help City staff focus on what residents need more information on, what issues are critical to their quality of life, and improve the City’s overall communication plan.

In the compact studio inside City Hall, complete with sound absorption panels, bright lights, a calming background, and a throw rug, Matt Seaton, Creative Marketing Specialist for the City of Hutto, makes the magic happen. Matt shoots the standup video, writes the script, serves as a “coach” to Mayor Gaul, and edits the final copy. Once the lights and camera are ready and the teleprompter is set, he and Mayor Gaul aim to make the video exciting and fun, as well as informative.

The production is not just a head shot of Mayor Gaul talking, but it is filled with upbeat music and scenes from around the city of Hutto.

As soon as this bi-weekly production is completed on Friday mornings, it is posted on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and is featured on the front page of the City’s website. Once that happens, the comments start coming in.

“In the beginning, I was somewhat camera-shy,” said Mayor Gaul, “but now I feel much more comfortable being in front of a camera. I like being able to share the headlines from the previous night’s council meeting with our citizens who could not attend or watch on the website, and I especially like keeping it brief.”

For now, this production will remain just as the title suggests – one minute long. But as Hutto continues its rapid growth, the video production may have to stretch to cover more highlights and be renamed “moment” with the Mayor. For now, the City of Hutto is successful, with limited staff and budget, in getting the hot topics of the Council meetings featured in a very timely manner.
SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES FROM BRYAN’S MIDTOWN PLAN

By Kristen Waggener, Communications and Marketing Manager, and Lindsay Hackett, Staff Planner, City of Bryan

The Midtown area of Bryan, located within the core of the 85,000-person city, has experienced significant development demand and pressures that have sparked the attention of the community. At approximately two square miles, the Midtown area is a premiere landscape for significant sustainable development that can accommodate growing demand for quality housing, commercial services, restaurants, and entertainment offerings, while enhancing the existing neighborhood fabric along the corridor.

With public engagement and transparency at the forefront, the City of Bryan embarked on a proactive planning process to tackle the challenges and unlock the opportunities in Midtown. The year-long process included significant efforts to engage residents and stakeholders in the Midtown area.

The city’s goal was to include as many people and gather as many ideas as possible to ensure the final plan was supported by the community. The Bryan City Council initially appointed the Midtown Area Plan Advisory Committee, which was comprised of local business owners and real estate developers, representatives from Bryan’s appointed boards, City staff, and representatives of local trade, tourism, and economic development groups. To engage a broader audience of residents in the area, we implemented several strategies, knowing that everyone has different preferences to receive information and give feedback. From online surveys and mail-out invitations, to media preview meetings and a dynamic project website, the City of Bryan has placed every effort into engaging its community in a transparent and welcoming manner.
In-person meetings: City staff planned and executed four dynamic and engaging in-person public workshops on a variety of dates, times, and locations to ensure that the maximum number of residents and stakeholders were able to attend. We presented information, asked for feedback, and conducted fun, interactive activities to gather input during these meetings.

Direct contact: Reaching out to residents and business owners in the Midtown area was a key tactic to boost engagement, as the City wanted to ensure everyone knew their input was wanted and valued. Staff mailed invitations to every resident, homeowner, and business owner within the Midtown area to ensure all property owners and tenants were invited to the public workshops. Additionally, the city promoted and used an email list to provide project updates to people who expressed interest in knowing more.

Visual storytelling: While the City of Bryan used traditional written methods of communicating the complicated information as part of the Midtown planning project, staff knew that they couldn’t always count on people reading pages of text. So, to complement newsletter articles and press releases, staff put together engaging video recaps of each public meeting. These recaps showed what was presented and presented an overview of the input received. These videos were embedded on the project webpage and promoted on the City’s social media channels.

Digital footprint: Due to the extended timeline, having information readily available for those interested in the Midtown project was very important. That’s why the City of Bryan created a dedicated webpage and URL (bryantx.gov/midtown) for the project. This site was updated at varying benchmarks during the planning and engagement process. The City also extensively used social media to pique residents’ interest in the project and drive traffic to the webpage where people could learn more.

Online surveys: Staff were keenly aware that not all residents and business owners could take time out of their busy schedules to attend in-person meetings. But their
input was just as valuable as that from those who could attend. So, staff and consultants created online surveys to gauge opinions and give those residents an opportunity to voice their feedback during the process.

Media outreach: Because Bryan-College Station is its own metro area, there is a robust media landscape, where most reporters are focused on hyper-local content. The city ensured that reporters from television, newspaper, and radio all had the information they needed to report on the Midtown project effectively. This included holding media preview meetings, where reporters could preview and ask questions about information that would be presented to the public later that day. Staff also attended more than a dozen interviews with local media throughout the project’s lifespan.

The City saw massive success come from these intentional engagement strategies. These results include 23 local news articles about Midtown, 300 signups for the email distribution list, 400 survey responses, more than 5,000 visits to the Midtown website (making it one of the top 20 most visited pages on the City’s overall website), and more than 14,000 impressions on social media.

The City also received positive feedback to the engagement effort: “Whatever this turns out to be, nobody can say you didn’t ask us what we wanted.” Kathleen Witte, KBTX anchor.

“I just want to THANK YOU for the email. That seems to be the only way for others to notify me of things. TV is air pollution to me and radio is worse. Please continue the emails.” Bryan resident.

And, the City of Bryan isn’t done! Once the Midtown Plan is considered by the Bryan City Council in the fall, staff will hold another public workshop to update the community on any changes, distribute information through the City’s communications channels, and meet with various stakeholder groups to answer questions.

More information about the Midtown engagement process can be found at bryantx.gov/midtown.
Historically, neighbors were more connected, knew everyone on their block, and took care of each other. Neighborhoods today are often faced with residents who are disengaged and unfamiliar with those living directly next door. With more than 284,000 residents, the City of Plano understands the importance of knowing your neighbors. The City’s Neighborhood Services department developed strategies and tools for strengthening Plano’s neighborhoods and addressing issues related to the maturing of the community. Through the interconnectivity of three divisions, BEST Neighborhoods, Housing and Community Services, and Property Standards; the department works cooperatively to link community needs with community resources to foster the most desirable neighborhoods in the nation. Each of the department’s programs are based in one of the four service pillars used to achieve our mission: educate, enable, enlist, and enforce.

The BEST (beautiful, engaged, safe, thriving) Neighborhoods Division primarily focuses on neighborhood engagement and strives to enhance Plano neighborhoods through responsive programming and collaborative partnerships between neighborhood leaders, residents, volunteers, City departments, and community organizations. The division primarily focuses on three of the four pillars: educate, enable, and enlist.

Enlist

Since 2010, the City’s Love Where You Live (LWYL) program has impacted eight Plano neighborhoods. The neighborhoods are selected based on property violations, crime statistics, age of housing, calls for service, and other related factors. This program is a neighborhood revitalization initiative comprised of two major components: social transformation through education, awareness and neighborhood
engagement; and physical transformation through minor exterior home repairs and community cleanups. The BEST Neighborhoods division leads the City’s effort in concentrating on a LWYL neighborhood for at least a year. During the year, monthly meetings are held with residents to increase awareness of programs and services most needed to address community concerns. Two service days are also held where hundreds of volunteers from across the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex take part in the physical transformation of the neighborhood. Throughout the year, resident leaders are identified and technical assistance is provided to help residents form a neighborhood group to continue the engagement. Over the years, we have noticed a sense of pride is restored into the community and neighborhoods are strengthened and can once again love where they live.

Since the department formed in 2014, many of our community partners and residents have consistently volunteered through the LWYL program and other programs offered by Neighborhood Services, including Plano CARES (Code Abatement by Residents Engaged in Service) and the annual Homeless Count. To recognize our volunteers’ selfless acts of kindness, energize our volunteer base, and inspire new volunteers to join, the department kicked off the Good Neighbor Volunteer Program in October 2019. Through this program, volunteers are trained as Ambassadors to assist with community outreach and/or be recognized as Builders assisting with minor home repair projects through Plano CARES and LWYL.

**Educate**

For neighborhoods that have an existing sense of community with people already loving where they live, the department offers several programs geared toward strengthening neighborhood leadership and community engagement efforts. Many of our programs require neighborhoods to register in our neighborhood database to participate. The database currently has 223 registered neighborhood groups. Once registered, a planner assigned to the neighborhood cluster contacts the local leaders to discuss our neighborhood engagement program tools.

The newest resource in our toolbox is the Neighborhood Leadership Academy. The first class began in September 2019. The Academy is a free program that was developed to support and enhance neighborhood groups wanting to make a greater community impact. The Academy meets once a month through August 2020. Neighborhood groups will work together to identify a neighborhood project and will be encouraged to collaborate between scheduled sessions. Topics include: assessing strengths and gaps; marketing; community organizing and resident engagement; and finding and using your community’s assets.

There are a number of other opportunities for neighborhood leaders to gather and learn from subject experts and each other. Annually, the City collaborates with the Cities of Garland and Rowlett to host a Homeowner Association Legal Clinic and Neighborhood Summit. Held in March, the legal clinic targets mandatory homeowner associations and provides an opportunity for them to hear from legal experts on trending legislation that impact their associations. The Neighborhood Summit provides a space for neighborhoods in all three jurisdictions to network and learn from each other and subject matter experts on trending neighborhood topics. This year’s summit, “Building Neighborhood Leadership,” will be held in Plano at the Collin College Conference Center on November 9, from 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Additionally, the City hosts quarterly workshops and roundtables through its Neighbors Connect series. Topics vary from planning great community meetings, emergency preparedness, and diversity and inclusion. The Neighbors Connect Series helps strengthen neighborhoods by engaging residents through peer-to-peer sharing and subject expert discussions.
In addition to attending meetings, neighborhood groups may connect with each other through the Neighborhood Directory that lists board member contact information and neighborhood expertise. Through the directory, groups are able to ask other neighborhood groups specific questions and request a mentor when needed.

For residents in need of information on forming a neighborhood group, developing a new resident welcome package, or other neighborhood engagement ideas, there is a Neighborhood Resource page on the BEST Neighborhoods Division website.

**Enable**

One of the City’s strategic goals is to have “vibrant and renewing neighborhoods.” The most fun and exciting program the BEST Neighborhoods Division uses to support this goal is the Pop-up Party Trailer. The trailer is free to registered neighborhoods, and includes everything a neighborhood group would need for a block party; including tables, chairs, games, trash cans, and more. For neighborhoods hosting a block party without using the trailer, free street closure requests are processed. On average, Plano neighborhoods host 80 block parties each year. Understanding that some neighborhood groups have limited funding to work toward resident collaboration, building leadership, and increasing outreaching to neighbors, the Neighborhood Engagement Mini-Grant program was created for voluntary neighborhood groups. Voluntary neighborhood groups may apply for up to $500 for designing a website, developing new neighbor welcome packages, meeting signage, flyers, and similar projects to increase neighborhood engagement and connectivity. Grants are offered on a rolling basis throughout the year.

For neighborhoods working towards community beautification, groups may apply for the Neighborhood Vitality and Beautification Grant (NVBG) which awards grants up to $10,000. Selected projects must support neighborhood goals, be highly visible, have a community benefit,
enlist community participation, and result in an enhancement of the neighborhood appearance. Grants are offered twice year. Typical projects include landscaping, sign toppers, benches, and decorative lighting.

The BEST Neighborhoods Designation program was established to recognize Plano neighborhoods that have gone above and beyond to create a beautiful, engaged, safe, and thriving community. Applications are accepted on an annual basis in October and are scored and recognized as silver, gold, and platinum. Each category receives digital recognition and platinum neighborhoods are also acknowledged at a City Council meeting and receive designated neighborhood signage.

Measure Impact

With the many programs and services offered by the BEST Neighborhoods Division, one has to ask “are these programs effective?” To help answer this question, surveys are conducted throughout the year, and at least once a year, the BEST Neighborhoods Division hosts a series of focus groups to gather feedback from residents on existing and new program initiatives. The information received helps improve and tailor programs and services to neighborhood needs. Since 2016, the annual number of neighborhoods that participated in programs has increased from 59 to 128. The $300,000 invested in the community through the NVBG program each year, typically supports 46 neighborhood beautification projects. As a result, many residents are taking ownership of their neighborhoods, planning inclusive community events, and helping to coach other neighborhood groups. With the support of our neighborhood leaders, Plano’s neighborhoods are getting stronger and increasingly more engaged.

For more information on the BEST Neighborhoods programs and other programs offered by the City of Plano’s Neighborhood Services department, please visit planoneighborhoods.org or call 972-208-8150 ★

FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY LEADERS ABOUT PLANO’S NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAMS

The trailer was essential to having a complete event where people can converse while having fun. We have non-residents attend and they were most impressed...provide a true sense of community. – Oak Creek Estates

Children got to meet each other for the first time and neighbors from around the block got to meet each other for the first time. It was nice to put a name with the face. – Reflections of Old Shepard Place

This Mini-Grant program is excellent and we have no recommendations to improve it. The staff we have interacted with in the Neighborhood Services Department are knowledgeable, helpful and responsive. This program adds significant value to Plano residents/homeowners – Hunters Creek

The trailer allows us to be able to tell our neighbors to just come to the block party! No chairs or anything were needed! We met many new neighbors and many others we hadn’t met before. It was such a great get together and fun was had by all. – Stone Lake Estates

This is an excellent program to enhance neighborhood’s look and feel and gives an opportunity to the community to volunteer in their neighborhood beautification. – Medina Villas

Great program. We really need this type of support from the city to be able to initiate these types of improvements to our neighborhood. We will look for opportunities with this program in the future. – Villages of Preston Meadows

This is a great program and has allowed our HOA to make a number of noticeable and significant improvements to our neighborhood. – Villages of Preston Meadows

The program is working great for our neighborhood. With this grant, work was performed that would have not happened for a couple more years. We are grateful for the City of Plano Neighborhood Vitality and Beautification Grant Program. The administrators have been great to work with. – Forest Creek North III and IV

The City of Plano amazes me as to how connected the City and “people” are! – Neighbors Connect participant
For the second straight year, the City of Arlington conducted a strategic, innovative communication campaign to help make the City Council’s budget planning and approval process and property tax rate adoption easier to understand and more engaging for residents and business owners.

The Office of Communication’s Budget in Action campaign aimed to educate the public about the $523 million operating budget and showcase the value of the services provided by the City of Arlington. The seven-week campaign included a series of regularly scheduled infographics, social media posts, online articles, Facebook Live videos, presentations at public meetings and a budget video, which has received more than 500,000 views on the City’s YouTube channel.

To help make the budget more relatable, this year’s video compared shopping at the grocery store to the foundations of the City budget. For example, each household contributes just under $3 a month to the Arlington Public Library, which is about the cost of a gallon of milk.

“When residents feel included in the process and can see real-life examples that demonstrate the value of their taxpayer dollars at work, they can see how effectively their government is working for them,” said Jay Warren, Arlington’s director of communication and legislative affairs.

This year’s Budget in Action campaign achieved a reach of 720,077 through Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, a 104 percent increase from the 352,387 impressions over last year’s campaign. Arlington’s population is around 380,000, if that helps to put those numbers in perspective.

Budget in Action is just one of the many examples of how the City of Arlington engages with residents using data, an initiative that caught the attention of Bloomberg Philanthropies and Results for America. This year, Arlington became the first city in the country to receive Results for America’s Sharman Stein Award for Storytelling Changemakers.
BUDGET IN ACTION

FY2020 Proposed Budget
$523 Million

CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES
Invest In Our Economy
Enhance Regional Transportation
Put Technology To Work
Champion Great Neighborhoods
Support Youth and Families

BUDGET IN ACTION

53% SCHOOL DISTRICTS
9% HOSPITAL TARRANT COUNTY
9% CITY OF ARLINGTON
24%
LEAGUE CITY PROGRAMS PROMOTE COMMUNITY

By Nora Garcia, Communications Coordinator, City of League City

If you look around League City’s website, you’ll get a sense for our culture of engagement. Under the “Our Community” tab, residents can find opportunities to volunteer, short videos highlighting various departments at work, profiles of City staff, stories featuring residents and local businesses (the heart of League City), inspiration to share #LClove on social media, and much more.

League City is committed to building strong connections that bind the community. Here are several successful programs that promote community engagement by encouraging residents to become active participants in their local government.

**Citizen University**

League City launched Citizens University in 2015. The mission of the League City Citizens University is to familiarize the residents and business owners of League City with the purpose, process, and structure of the City’s government and equip citizens to become active participants in municipal operations.

Each session includes an interactive presentation from City staff on various services and issues, as well as an understanding of how citizens play a crucial role in leading League City into the future. The course may also include tours of City facilities. Participants are also encouraged to attend and volunteer at different City events.

Registration is open on a first-come, first-serve basis for League City residents or business owners who are:

- 18 years of age or older
- Not currently holding a position as an elected official or running for office during class session

Citizen University is held over a 10-week period every Thursday from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and it is offered twice a year.
Citizen Police Academy

The League City Citizen Police Academy is designed to allow attendees to learn more about the philosophy, values, and the day-to-day operations of the League City Police Department (LCPD). The focus is on how and why members of the department perform their various duties. This is a great opportunity to learn, explore, and get some hands-on experience. The Citizen Police Academy was formed in League City in 2002. Classes begin in January and August of each year and run for 15 weeks with meetings once a week.

Students receive instruction on topics such as accident investigations, detention officers, criminal investigations, firearm safety, patrol operations, and traffic law.

VIP Program

After completing the Citizen Police Academy and learning more about the LCPD, most participants want to stay actively involved and choose to become a police volunteer as part of the Volunteers in Policing program, or VIPs. Volunteers in Policing was created by the LCPD in an effort to support and supplement existing police services. The program promotes and maintains a safe and desirable living environment in our community. Police volunteers serve the community in several ways. They assist with code compliance enforcement issues, including removal of prohibited signs, reporting graffiti, and overgrown yards. Trained volunteers are given criminal case packets and assigned a target area to make contact with League City citizens in an effort to obtain case-related information. This information is used to develop investigative leads and resolve local crimes. Teams of police volunteers can also patrol League City parking lots, documenting violations, and issuing citations and warnings to vehicle owners parked illegally. Our police volunteers are encouraged to ride along with League City Police Officers. This opportunity allows citizens to come together in service to their community and interact with local law enforcement.
Collaboration and cooperation are ingrained hallmarks of City of Anna residents, evidenced by the enthusiastic response to a recent community build project that added a playground to historic Sherley Park.

Community build projects are excellent vehicles that cities use to engage their citizenry in a communal activity that will benefit the entire community, and if that was the sum and total of the City of Anna project, it would look very much like any other.
The Anna project, however, has been in the making for more than a century. Long before the City was established, residents of the nascent North Texas community knew the critical importance of banding together and speaking with one voice.

It was that deeply ingrained sense of communal partnership that actually gave rise to the establishment of what is today among the fastest growing cities in North Texas. Were it not for the fortitude of the few families who owned property in the area where Anna sits today, there would likely be no City.

Recently the City asked residents to come forward once again, this time to help build a playground on a small plot of land, donated to the City by a long-established family. As mentioned, though, the genesis of this particular community build playground in Anna actually goes back over 100 years.

In the late 1870s, the Houston Texas Central railroad company was looking to lay some track from their headquarters in East Texas north through Texas and into the midwest states and territories. While the railroad was planning its routes, some communities in the North Texas area balked at having a train run through their land, and rejected the intrusion of railroad tracks.

In response, railroad executives decided to lay tracks through sparsely populated areas, which included land once owned by Collin McKinney, after whom the county and the county seat are named. McKinney was also among the signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence. Shortly after the railroad arrived, people realized the economic advantage of living near the rail line and began to build homes and businesses along the tracks. Once the population reached critical mass, the town of Anna was platted as a 16-block town, with the railroad depot as the geographic center.

The Houston Texas Central railroad depot in Anna, a wooden structure which was originally designed to accommodate an ever-growing number of passengers and cargo, became the epicenter of the new community. Thus, the City of Anna took root, beginning its steady growth, thanks in large part to the addition of the small depot.

And, while competition in the railroad industry during that era, fierce to say the least, resulted in a diminishing of the depot’s size and importance, it still remained in constant use, mostly for transporting the grains, cotton, corn, and other crops produced by Anna farms.

Records indicate that the depot was in continuous use until about 1956, a span of some 75 years in which the depot withstood long, dry summers, bone-chilling windy winters, and the ever-present dangers of tornados. In a tribute to the construction methods and materials used, the one-story, A-frame building has nevertheless kept its structural integrity throughout.

Following the decommissioning of the depot, a local farmer asked the railroad company for the building, intending to use it for storage. With no plan for the structure, the railroad was all too happy to have the local resident take the building. Once transported to the farm, the former depot began its long and unassuming second life as a storage building.

Meanwhile, as the City, still true to its agricultural roots, was growing in population, the Sherley family established a general goods store on a small plot of land near the railroad tracks shortly after the turn of the century. The business flourished as more people made Anna their home. Responding to the growing demand, the Sherley brothers purchased a larger piece of property across the street from their location and replaced the original store with an expanded facility, providing goods and sundries to the growing population in the days before World War I. The site of the original store became an empty lot.

Following the end of the second World War, the Sherley family closed what had, by then, become a hardware store, and donated the empty plot of land where the original store had been built to the City of Anna as a park.

With the addition of a backstop, the then new Sherley Park became a baseball field, albeit too small for league games. For many years, baseball teams used the park for infield practice and to sharpen their base-running skills.

Then around three years ago, the first of several convergence points occurred as the City of Anna and the Anna Area Historical Preservation Society (AAHPS) began the conversation that eventually converted Sherley Park from a little-used practice field into the new home of the old train depot, which, through a series of favorable transactions, was under the care and ownership of the AAHPS.

Things then began to move swiftly as grants were secured to restore the depot to its early condition, and a layout for...
historically-significant Sherley Park to become an archival center, with the depot forming the centerpiece, was put in place.

Designs included an arrangement where self-paced tours of the depot, the interior of which would be lined with historic photos and accompanying narratives, would give visitors and students a look back at Anna’s founding. The restored depot was moved to Sherley Park, and the collection and identification of exhibit material was begun.

Then, a second convergence point occurred. The City hired Jim Proce as City Manager. Proce, a veteran of municipal administration with a strong public works background, is a straight-talking, tell-it-like-it-is, highly-collaborative professional, who, according to Anna Mayor Nate Pike, was just the kind leader of the City was looking for.

Proce set about surveying the lay of the land, and hit the ground at a breakneck speed. He updated policies and procedures, implemented protocols that left little to chance, and began building his team. Already in progress when he arrived was the effort to construct a new City Hall and Fire Station. Proce’s experience came into play as he and his team carefully reviewed every aspect of the impending construction contracts, ensuring that the City was well-positioned for the project.

He implemented a strong economic development program, enhancing the team with proven professionals who shared and promulgated the same vision as the Mayor and Council.

Then, there was Sherley Park and the Anna depot. Proce saw the need to activate the remaining space at the park, in which the depot occupied less than a third of the park’s footprint.

“I saw that we needed to make it a people space,” he said, going beyond and enhancing the historical context that served as the original plan. “I saw that there was enough room to make it truly a place where families would gather not just to celebrate the City’s history, but also to spend time together and share their leisure time.”

A playground and pavilion would complete the park and make it fulfil the vision that Proce and his staff had for the space.

The third convergence point became apparent. While the pavilion would be constructed by a professional construction company, the playground would become a community build project.
Having already overseen the construction of a community build playground in one of his previous stops, Proce became the project’s chief proponent. His personal background in minor and major construction and remodeling projects as a helper to his dad in his native New York, gave him the confidence to push the project forward. In fact, he and his wife have built and remodeled their homes in Florida and Texas.

Partnering with Play by Design, a company that creates and designs customized plans for playgrounds and provides limited supervision of construction, became an essential part of the process. Play by Design took great pains to ensure that the playground design meshed carefully and faithfully to the depot, the nearby water tower, and a vintage locomotive that the City has purchased.

The steam engine locomotive will be a permanent part of the Sherley Park tableau once its restoration is complete.

“The playground’s amenities are a direct reflection of the elements already at the park,” said Proce. “We have been very careful to tie everything together. When it’s all said and done, the park and the playground will be fully integrated.”

Recruited by social media and word of mouth, local residents flocked to the community build site. The one-week build started on a Monday and by Friday, the playground was essentially complete. Meanwhile, the steel-construction and concrete floor pavilion was also completed at about the same time. A few final details on the playground were completed in the days following the end of construction.

“We have grand plans for the space,” said Proce. “There are fences to move, and the vintage water tower, which is no longer in use, will be painted, and we’ll do some other touches. Our goal is to make it a space where people are eager to congregate.”

Talk about a summer concert series, farmers market, community parties, and other such activities and events have circulated around town, giving residents a specific place for sharing both family time and community time.

“We have activated the space, just like we’ve talked about, and now it’s up to us to keep it activated,” Proce added.

City employees, Mayor Pike, members of the City Council, neighborhood groups, developers and builders, and their families, were all key components of the community build, each contributing to the project’s completion.

“The build project gave people a chance to work together. People who perhaps did not know each other before all came together, each with a different skill level, and lent a helping hand,” said Proce. “When they see each other at the grocery store or at church from now on, they’ll have special connection that they would not have had before.”

And, that is convergence point number four. ★
This year marks an important milestone for Texas — the 20th Anniversary of Senate Bill 7, the state’s groundbreaking electric deregulation law. Although not immediate in effect, the legislation eventually changed how most Texans purchase electricity. It also transformed the Texas economy. But in significant ways, S.B. 7 likewise impacted city governments. The law, for instance, created new opportunities for public-private partnerships and the aggregation of the electric accounts by political subdivisions. Obtaining electricity service also became a bigger challenge for residential customers and some cities stepped in to help.

With two decades of hindsight, what can we say worked best with S.B. 7 and what were its misfires? And most important from a municipal perspective: how did S.B. 7 affect city operations?

In commemoration of the law’s 20th birthday and with an eye for this month’s community engagement theme, let’s take a quick look back at the Texas electric deregulation law. How did we get here, where are we going, and how has S.B. 7 changed the manner in which city governments engage with their own communities?

The History

It’s been 20 years since former Governor George W. Bush and the Texas legislature adopted S.B. 7. The governor’s signature came on June 18, 1999, and with it, he set the
groundwork for the all-encompassing competitive electric market that is now familiar to most Texans. Only exempted from retail competition under S.B. 7 are areas outside ERCOT — that is, the state’s main power grid — and areas served by electric cooperatives and municipal utilities. Separate from the retail market, the state’s transmission and distribution providers also remained rate regulated by cities and the Public Utility Commission.

The complicated omnibus legislation, more than 150 pages in length with more than a half-dozen major provisions, including a wide expansion of wholesale electric deregulation, the first-ever authorization of competition among retail electric providers, new renewable energy mandates and the greenlight for utilities to seek billions of dollars in payments known as “stranded costs.” S.B. 7 also spelled out provisions for a pre-deregulation pilot project so the grid operator could test new computerized systems. And while this pilot did not go as planned — prices spiked, system glitches nearly derailed the whole enterprise — the new market opened as scheduled on Jan. 1, 2002.

Outcomes

The framers of Senate Bill 7 promised substantial benefits to consumers — new service options for example, and lower electricity prices. The results, however, have been mixed.

Scores of retail electric providers established themselves in the Texas market over the years, and these new “REPs” offer residential consumers a multitude of options. This was what the framers hoped for. But this new market competition did not lead to better prices — not at first.

Our research has shown that residential electric prices in Texas were below the national average before deregulation, but after the transition they rose above it in deregulated areas. Residential electric prices in areas exempt from deregulation remained below the national average, however.

This dynamic created a measurable gap between deregulated and non-deregulated prices. That gap began small — in 2002, for instance, deregulated residential prices were about 3.5 percent higher than deregulation-exempt residential prices. But the gap widened by 2007 to nearly 50 percent.

We observed a similar, albeit less dramatic, trend among commercial customers. In 2002, average commercial deregulated prices were four percent higher than average commercial prices outside deregulation. By 2007, that gap had widened to nearly 28 percent. And keep in mind that this is the customer class that includes Texas cities and other political subdivisions.

But the competitive market began to improve, and eventually made strides. Customers become more familiar with their options. Average prices dropped.

For example, our research also shows that residential prices in areas with competition have decreased precipitously since 2008. As a result, the wide residential price gap observed during the first decade of S.B. 7 had nearly vanished by 2017. The story is even better for commercial customers: average deregulated prices dipped below deregulation-exempt prices in 2012. By 2017, average commercial prices in deregulated areas were 17.6 percent lower than outside-deregulation prices.

Impact to Cities

S.B. 7 has had its impacts on the purchase and sale of power in the wholesale market, the distribution of that power in the retail market, and the responsibilities of end-use customers. These changes in turn have rippled through the entire Texas economy. S.B. 7 also affected cities. Energy procurement, for instance, became much more fraught.

I’ll discuss procurement issues in a moment, but first let’s take a look at examples of city-sponsored energy programs made possible through S.B. 7. I’ve selected two for discus-
sion purposes. Both also touch upon this month’s Texas Town & City topic of community engagement.

The City of Houston has proposed an ambitious free-market based project to create an inner-city solar farm at the site of a former landfill. When complete, the Sunnyside Energy Solar Farm may very well be the largest urban solar project of its kind in the nation. The City is providing the land, but otherwise the ambitious project depends upon the competitive forces unleashed by S.B. 7 for its success. It also requires buy-in from the local community.

“Community engagement is absolutely vital for this project,” Lara Cottingham, the City’s Chief Sustainability Officer, explained recently. “We have had stakeholder meetings and we will continue to have stakeholder meetings every step along the way — this package must be what the community wants. The City has reached out to the local community to make this happen.”

For the project, the City will commit an unused parcel south of downtown, in the community of Sunnyside. Private operators will build and manage it. When complete the Sunnyside Energy Solar Farm should generate enough power for about 12,000 homes. The project also includes provisions for low-income electricity subsidies. Cottingham said the City had to create a program with the rules of SB 7 in mind, but that community engagement also is absolutely essential. “The City specifically asked that the developers work with the local community to make this happen,” she said.

Our second example relates to programs supported by many cities to promote something called “citizen aggregation.” These are programs under which customers can band together to purchase electricity in groups — a practice that should result in lower rates for residential electric service and better contracts. S.B. 7 specifically contemplates the creation of citizen aggregation programs, and directly authorizes political subdivisions to contract with third parties to administer them.

And at least a dozen cities have done so. Through online efforts and mailers, these cities have provided their citizens details about the benefits of electric aggregation and useful contact information.

As one city official explained, citizen aggregation helps the community’s residents better understand the market and saves them time. It also supports electric competition.

“One of the biggest things we realized when we did our surveys, was that over 70 percent of people in our area were not shopping for electricity, not in the last three years — and they were paying higher rates,” Michael Kovacs, Fate city manager, told us recently. His city, a member of the Texas Coalition for Affordable Power, has been working for some time with a third party to promote citizen aggregation.

“What we wanted to do with this program was save people time, and money. … We do a lot of community engagement to support it, and it costs us nothing.”

New Challenges

S.B. 7 also has created important challenges for cities. As I mentioned earlier, one of the major ones relates to energy procurement. Poorly written contracts can lead to unwelcome surprises. A lack of knowledge about the market can undermine budgets. Before the implementation of S.B. 7, city officials had little reason to concern themselves with all these fine-print details. Now cities ignore them at their peril.

But as with residential consumers, S.B. 7 also offers a solution. The legislation permits cities to aggregate together in a similar fashion as the aggregation of residential customers and these groups leverage their numbers to obtain better contracts. Municipal aggregation groups can also hire expert consultants to handle procurement, contract administration, billing and other technical issues.

S.B. 7 allows cities something even more. Under its provisions, some municipal aggregators have the ability to procure power directly from wholesalers. No single commercial purchaser of electricity in the Texas competitive market can enjoy this authority. This unique provision of law was included in S.B. 7 at the insistence of cities.

Challenges and opportunities — the 20-year history of S.B. 7 has been defined by both. Prices did not respond favorably at first, but the competitive electricity market improved over time. City governments have entered into new public-private partnerships because of S.B. 7 and reached out to their communities to support those partnerships. The law also inspired important initiatives.

Now onward to new challenges, opportunities and community partnerships — here’s to the next 20 years of S.B. 7. ★

Jay Doegey is the executive director of the Texas Coalition for Affordable Power, which is comprised of more than 160 cities and other political subdivisions that procure electricity in the deregulated market for their own governmental use. Prior to this position, Doegey was city attorney for the City of Arlington and, in that capacity, an advocate for cities in the area of utility policy. For more information or to reach Doegey, visit www.tcaptx.org.
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As amazing as it feels to be recognized for a professional achievement, many people feel uncomfortable during their moment in the spotlight. We often believe that the only polite response to a public congratulatory statement, or even a private compliment, is denial, or at a minimum, downplaying a success. Accepting professional praise doesn’t have to be awkward. Here are some tips for receiving an honor with grace and humility.

**KEEP IT SIMPLE**

The proper response to any compliment is a simple “thank you.” Rather than a verbal rebuke (“It was really nothing...” or, “No, it was nothing, stop!”), respond with sincere gratitude for the kind words of praise. Don’t deny the compliment, argue its legitimacy, or insult the other person by implying you don’t deserve the credit. Just as it would be bad etiquette to refuse a handshake, it’s also impolite to dismiss the other person’s observation.

**SHOW YOUR GRATITUDE**

An appropriate response can include any genuine display of gratitude, whether it’s extending your arms for a friendly hug (under the right circumstances), remarking how much the compliment means to you, or a confident handshake expressing sincerity and respect.

**SWAP DENIALS FOR MODEST COMMENTS**

In reality, it’s sometimes hard to just say “thank you” and leave it at that. If you feel like you need to say more, you can add in some neutral statements that honor your desire to not appear arrogant yet don’t contradict the compliment. Follow “thank you” with phrases such as, “I really enjoyed working on this project” or, “It was challenging, but it all came together.”

**SHARE THE SPOTLIGHT**

It’s never appropriate to hog all the credit. If you led a team effort, by all means, accept the accolade and don’t downplay your role. But if it was truly a group effort, be sure to also acknowledge the contributions of your team. If your recognition comes in the form of a public ceremony, brush up on a few more tips to commemorate the moment with poise.

**SMILE**

You may feel ill at ease in front of a large group of people when someone is acknowledging you with a compliment, but don’t shy away from making direct eye contact with the person speaking, giving them an authentic smile, and quietly mouthing a word of thanks.

**SHAKE HANDS LIKE A STAR**

If you are thanked or congratulated on a stage, extend your left hand to accept the gift or award while reaching out with your right hand to shake hands with the presenter.

**GET READY FOR YOUR PHOTO OPP**

When being photographed while receiving an award, be mindful that the photographer has a job to do. Pause and wait for the picture to be taken before jumping out of the frame of the camera lens. This is key to avoiding your backside or an out-of-focus picture on your city’s Facebook page.

**MOTION TO THE TEAM**

Physically reach out your hands towards those in the audience who helped you achieve your success, signaling with your body language that you are including them in your accolades. Mouthing “thank you” as you make eye contact. When possible, acknowledge their joint efforts in words.

*Diane Gottsman is a national etiquette expert, author of Modern Etiquette for a Better Life, and founder of The Protocol School of Texas. This article originally appeared on Huffington Post*
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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

#### TEXAS MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

**November 19, 2019**

**Volume CVI Number 10**

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The Pool PROUDLY PARTNERS with local government so that Texas communities are STRONGER TOGETHER

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- Power Facility Inspections
- Fire and Life Safety Inspections
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Bureau Veritas is here for you in the relief and rebuild efforts from Hurricane Harvey.