An ACEC Texas member firm provided engineering for Almeda Road, a City of Houston Low Impact Development (LID) Pilot Project. Almeda had limited pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure and an inadequate number of lanes to accommodate traffic volumes. The firm’s design provided wide, tree-lined sidewalks for pedestrians/bikes and significantly improved traffic flow as a result of added travel lanes, intersection improvements, and signal-timing changes.
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ABOUT THE COVER

The Keep Weston Lakes Beautiful Adopt-a-Spot program encourages community participation in beautification efforts.

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.

Texas Town & City (ISSN 1084-5356) is published monthly except October for $30 per year ($3.00 per single copy) by the Texas Municipal League, 1821 Rutherford Lane, Suite 400, Austin, Texas 78754-5101. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas and additional mailing offices.

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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 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.

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 TOWN & CITY • 4 • AUGUST 2020
Dear Texas City Official,

The theme of this issue is beautification. That’s a topic I like, because I happen to think my town of Staples is one of the most beautiful in the state! But, I have a sneaking suspicion that you feel the same way about your own city. What makes that possible is that every location can be beautiful in its own way. Every Texas city is unique.

As we begin to approach the 2021 legislative session in Austin, the unique nature of each of our cities will increasingly be the League’s message to our partners in state government. What works in my town of Staples might not work in Midland. What works in Midland won’t necessarily work in Dallas. As city officials we know that intuitively, but many Texans, including our friends in Austin, might not.

Taking a one-size-fits-all approach to governing might seem appealing to some, but we have to push back against that idea, both for the health of our cities and our citizens. Challenges and problems hit different cities differently. That’s why there’s not one mayor for Texas cities, but 1,210 mayors! No matter the problem or issue, if we approach the Capitol with the unified message that cities need to be free to govern and serve uniquely, we can’t go wrong. We won’t win every fight, that’s impossible, but we’ll stand with one voice.

Eddie Daffern, CMO
Mayor
City of Staples
TML President
Stafford Loses a Legend

Mayor Leonard Scarcella, one of the nation’s longest, continuous serving mayors, died on Sunday, June 28, after a brief illness. Scarcella served more than 50 years as mayor of Stafford, Texas, having first been elected in 1969. His leadership and vision for the City has been the springboard to numerous notable achievements.

Scarcella led the battle to create and implement the Stafford Municipal School District, the only municipal district in the State of Texas. In 1995, under his leadership and with the disciplined fiscal approach he was known for, Stafford eliminated the city property tax. As mayor, he facilitated a partnership among the City, the Texas Department of Transportation, and Union Pacific Railroad for a $110 million enhancement of the United States 90A Corridor. He led the charge for the development of the Stafford Centre, an entertainment and cultural complex with a 1,100 seat performing arts theater, 25,000 square feet of convention center space, and four festival fields on 43 acres of land. Scarcella also sought and achieved the passage of legislation to finance and construct a state-of-the-art Science and Technology Center for Houston Community College in Stafford as the first such authorized city/college educational facility in the state.

A life-long Stafford resident, Scarcella was a graduate of Texas A&M University and the University of Houston Law School having practiced law for 53 years in Stafford. He served in the Texas Air National Guard with active duty in the United States Air Force.

TML President Bennett Sandlin said “Mayor Scarcella was a legend for serving his citizens with passion and advocating for local control. There will not be another like him for a long while.”

TML Coronavirus Resources

The League has a city-specific Coronavirus Resource page with links to state disaster orders and guidance, TML resources, and state and federal services. Want to review the governor’s recent disaster order or read one of the League’s past daily Coronavirus Updates? Visit www.tml.org/654/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Resources.

TML Annual Conference and Exhibition

The 2020 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition “From Crisis to Recovery,” will be held virtually from October 14-16. The Conference will feature city leaders and staff, state and federal officials, economic development specialists, and recovery experts discussing the resources, tools, and strategies needed to rebound and rebuild post-pandemic. TML plans to open conference registration on September 1.

Online Public Funds Investment Act Training

TML partners with Virtual Learning Concepts to offer online Public Funds Investment Act training for city officials. State law requires that the city’s treasurer, chief financial officer, and investment officer attend at least one 10-hour PFIA training session within 12 months after taking office, and an additional eight-hour course every successive two years. This online course offers the full 10 hours of certified training from the comfort of home or office. Testing will take place as course sections are completed, and a certificate of completion can be generated at the end of the course. Register for the course at www.virtuallearningconcepts.com.
We are committed to deploying a world-class program that is built on the foundation of trust, excellence, and science-based evidence, crucial to helping rebuild economy and businesses.

BV, in conjunction with the Cleveland Clinic is poised to act as Chief Medical Director, for BV’s **Restart your Business with BV Program**, is working to help you restore confidence in safety and hygiene standards. BV’s renowned knowledge in testing, inspection, and certification (TIC) will help you build confidence with employees, customers, and our communities across North America.

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A User Experience Designed by the Membership

Today, websites often serve as the first impression of an organization. Designing website technology based on internal need instead of soliciting and listening to the external user-voice is a trap that can befall many an organization. A properly designed website serves as an organization’s window into its products and services, and envisions what its customers need, or in the Pool’s case, the needs of the members. Furthermore, the design should anticipate changes will continue to be made that enable the organization to better meet the users’ needs. Usability is all about ease of use and intuitive design.

With these precepts in mind, in 2016 the Pool embarked on the arduous task of designing a website that would be both informative and provide useful tools for the Pool’s membership. The Pool relied on three main criteria for the design: user experience, historical data usage, and click limitations. This article defines these terms and explains how these impacted the end-product.

User Experience

Is the website of value to the user? Is it easy to use and pleasant to navigate? These are the questions that define “user experience.” To ensure the best user experience, the Pool hosted a focus group made up of varying member sizes and types, and utilized their feedback for initial website design. This ensured member expectations would be met and that the Pool was not making decisions based on any paradigms that did not align with the needs of the membership. Initial launch of the website was highly successful, and the Pool has continued to use member feedback to further refine the user experience.

Historical Data Usage

When redesigning the website, the Pool used Google Analytics to determine which areas the members accessed most frequently and then removed content that did not have a high percentage of usage. Today the Pool continues to use Google Analytics in order to provide timely and helpful information for the management of the website.

Click Limitations

The goal of click limitations is to limit the number of clicks to get to an action point. Otherwise, a user is likely to get frustrated if it takes more than a few mouse clicks to find the needed information. The Pool’s design goal required that a user would take no more than two clicks to get to an action point. This requirement continues to drive development so that a member’s user experience does not end in frustration. As a result, many tools are available at the click of a button.

After taking into consideration the above criteria, the Pool concluded that the website needed to have the following functionality:

- Online claims access
- Schedules of covered property
- Online training
- Reporting tool and audit trail of on-line activities.

Claims Submittals: Members can easily submit workers’ compensation, property, cyber, and liability claims online. Members can also access information such as the claim’s identification number and the name of the assigned adjuster.

Schedules Changes:

Members can now view, download to excel, and submit changes to schedules of their covered property: buildings, contents, automobiles, and mobile equipment.

Online Training:

Members can take online training, order training materials, and participate in webinars. This has become especially helpful during the pandemic, allowing employees to continue training while working remotely.

Reporting Building Tools:

Members can build their own reports or use the preprogrammed reports. This gives members the ability to see claims trends at the click of a button to help in making important risk management decisions.
Schedules Changes: Members can now view, download to excel, and submit changes to schedules of their covered property: buildings, contents, automobiles, and mobile equipment.

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Reporting Building Tools: Members can build their own reports or use the preprogrammed reports. This gives members the ability to see claims trends at the click of a button to help in making important risk management decisions.

Audit History: Members can view all submittals via “Portal Submissions:"

This helps a member keep track of changes to schedules and claims submissions.

Other tools available: Members also have risk management tools such as sample policies and best practice guides. Given the emergence of cyber exposures, the Pool dedicated a portion of the website solely to cyber risk. This webpage provides training, best practices, and even a list of vendors, all vetted by the Pool’s cyber partner, eRiskHub.

The Pool is Committed to a Positive and Productive User Experience

As noted above, a website should never stop evolving in the pursuit of continuous improvement. As such, the Pool is committed to providing the best experience possible for its members, and is a shining example of the Pool’s commitment to its core values: integrity, public service, fiscal responsibility, and operational excellence.

If you need help navigating the website or have any feedback, please reach out to your member services manager. ★
Roanoke's Revolutionary Independence Day

Fourth of July is a favorite holiday in the small City of Roanoke for residents of all ages. In recent years, celebrations drew upwards of 15,000 people – an impossibility in 2020 under the state’s COVID-19 restrictions. Instead of cancelling this year’s celebration or holding a fireworks show with no crowd, the City partnered with a professional production company to create Roanoke’s Virtual Third of July. The event was held as a virtual broadcast on the City’s website and social media platforms at 7:30 p.m. on July 3.

Residents who tuned in enjoyed a welcome from Mayor Scooter Gierisch along with his rendition of The Star-Spangled Banner, a BMX bike show from Lonestar Action Sports, a Journey Tribute Band, a magic performance by Kendall Kane, and videos of fireworks displays from past years.

A link to watch the event on demand was available to those who couldn’t tune into the live show.

The Show Must Go on in Denton

The City of Denton’s Fourth of July fireworks show may have been cancelled, but the City came up with a creative alternative. Denton’s annual Liberty Run was held as a virtual 5k run and parade.

The Virtual Liberty Run 5K took place throughout the City as participants walked or ran through their community’s neighborhoods and trails. Participants shared their walk or run online through the Denton parks and recreation department’s Facebook page. Registration was free. Participants could purchase an event t-shirt for $12.

In addition to the run, residents had the opportunity to watch a Fourth of July parade from their homes. The event started at 10:00 a.m. with a live kickoff on Facebook led by State Representative Lynn Stucky, and was followed by a broadcast of the parade. Those who missed the live celebration could view it on the City’s YouTube page post-event.

Brownsville Mask Design Contest Inspires Participation

Brownsville hosted a face mask design contest for the City’s creative minds to showcase the community’s artistic flair as it continues to encourage wearing facial coverings to slow the spread of COVID-19 in public places.

The challenge solicited designs from residents through a template made available online in two categories – freehand design and digital design. Budding, intermediate, and expert artists were invited to participate. Winners were chosen and recognized by the mayor and city commission during a commission meeting and received a $50 gift card from their favorite Brownsville restaurant. Winning designs will be reproduced and distributed throughout the community while supplies last.
“Aside from protecting our citizens through the use of face masks, we wanted to engage our very talented and artistic community to showcase their creativity,” Brownsville Mayor Trey Mendez said. “We are a very united community and this is a way of bringing us even closer together.”

Corpus Christi Encourages Safe Fun-Fit

Many people enjoy biking, running, jogging, and walking along the shoreline in Corpus Christi. However due to COVID-19, social distancing on the narrow pathway has been challenging. To increase physical activity and promote a healthier Corpus Christi, City Manager Peter Zanoni created a new health and wellness initiative that is taking place along the Corpus Christi Bayfront on Ocean Drive, between Cole Park and the Art Center of Corpus Christi. On Saturdays, Shoreline Boulevard is now temporarily closed to north bound traffic from 7:00-11:00 a.m. creating a fitness lane spanning 1.25 miles for residents to bike, run, jog, and walk along the Bayfront.

Classes are being offered through a partnership with VFit Productions, a local company devoted to promoting a healthy lifestyle, and the City’s parks and recreation Department. The City also announced its community partnership with H-E-B which is providing fruit and water. Participants are asked to bring their own face coverings, sunblock, yoga mat (if needed), and water for their workouts. Exercise and wellness events are being held on Saturdays through August 29, 2020. Pre-registration is required. This free program is for all skill levels, ages eight and older. ★

Saluting

CITY LEADERS AND THEIR TEAMS

Digging Deep to Serve Our Communities Under COVID-19

Every day, the professionals who keep Texas cities running face challenges that have no easy answers. Every day, they’re working the problem and preparing for next steps — through the pandemic and beyond. On behalf of your partners at Focused Advocacy and every Texan who calls a city home, thank you.

Curt Seidlits - Brandon Aghamalian - Snapper Carr
By Austin Bleess, City Manager, City of Jersey Village

Jersey Village has had its fair share of flooding over the years. Starting with Tropical Storm Allison in 1998 through the floods of 2002, the City experienced three flood events that devastated hundreds of homes. While the City worked in successive years to eliminate flooding during record rains, it was hit again in April 2016 by the Tax Day Flood when more than 230 homes were impacted.

In response, Jersey Village set in motion a strategy to create a Long-Term Flood Recovery Plan. The plan is the blueprint for actions that would eliminate future flood damage of homes, businesses, and facilities.

The first step in the plan was to secure a company that could accurately delineate flooding risks in the community. The City contracted with a firm to map out various flood risks, take elevation surveys of homes in danger of being flooded, and build a plan that would help mitigate future flood damage to property.

Throughout the process, Jersey Village held multiple community input sessions. The sessions allowed residents to share their experiences, information, and ideas for what could be done. The process kept citizens informed of solutions being looked at, alternatives to those solutions, and what the long-term impacts could be. The City received over 2,000 pages of feedback from residents.

The completed plan identified four main projects that would have positive outcomes. These projects were home elevations, increasing drainage in the Wall Street Neighborhood, a berm around the golf course, and deepening and widening the bayou through town. The plan identified other projects that could assist on a smaller scale as well as items that were non-construction related. It also included reviewing recommendations from residents to evaluate them for effectiveness. Some of the resident ideas were included in the final recommended projects. Those that were not included had data explaining why they were not good candidates for pursuit.

The final plan was adopted by the city council in September 2017, weeks after Hurricane Harvey dumped 31 inches of rain on Jersey Village. Harvey underscored the importance of the plan and the need for the City to significantly reduce or eliminate the flooding risks.

Flooding is a complex issue; one that cannot be solved by any single entity. In fact, the bayou system that helps to control and mitigate flooding is largely under the control of the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD). The City set out to create productive relationships with HCFCD to help move projects forward.

Residents look to their local government every day to provide them with protection via police, fire, water, and sewer. It is logical that local governments should also protect their citizens against floods and other natural disasters. Jersey
Village’s plan takes into account the entire community even though it is not all in the flood plain or in imminent threat of flooding. The City cannot solve flooding concerns in one area which could potentially move the issue to a different part of town. It doesn’t matter if the home is the most or least valuable one in town, the plan needs to help everyone.

The cost of the study was $620,917. The identified projects had an estimated total cost of $14 million. The City is actively pursuing grants that will help lower the cost. As of June 2020, the City has received $6,553,093 in grant funds to help pay for these projects.

Part of the awarded grant money will allow 22 homes to be elevated above the base flood elevation. Some grant funds will help with the construction of neighborhood drainage improvements, and other funds will support the design work to improve one of the bayous through the city in conjunction with HCFCD. This $6.5 million is part of the first round of grants the City will apply for in coming years. There will be many rounds of writing applications and receiving funds through FEMA and other sources to elevate or remove homes out of the flood plain.

One non-construction piece of the plan involved joining the Community Rating System (CRS). CRS provides discounts on flood insurance for residents and businesses. With the help of summer interns, the City put together a great road map to get us into the program. That road map and subsequent application allowed the City to enter CRS at a Level 7, which saves homeowners in the 100-year flood plain 15 percent on their insurance premium each year.

The City has worked closely with HCFCD and its congressional delegation to secure federal funding for the modifications to the main tributary of the White Oak Bayou system that runs through Jersey Village. That project had been on the books for years, but lacked funding to complete it. The project is now designed, and bids will be opened this summer.

The protection achieved when the plan is fully implemented will save well over $14 million in future damages. It will also bring hundreds of homes out of the flooding threat in the future. This provides great savings to the citizens of Jersey Village.

It’s not just the homes with a reduced threat of flooding that will benefit. The City’s image will be positively affected by its ability to shake the stigma of “the city that floods.” As Jersey Village shakes that stigma, the homes in the area will see an increase in value, which will benefit residents through increased property values.

The City’s ability to support and safeguard residents will also be positively impacted. As more homes are out of the threat of flooding, there will be far fewer rescues of people in flooded homes. And when the streets are not flooded, police and fire will be able to more effectively respond to incidents.

This program exemplifies all of the things that are great about local government. As responsible stewards of the City’s resources, Jersey Village is pursuing grants to cover expenses, removing homes from the 100-year flood plain, and collaborating to get these projects completed for the health and safety of its citizens. The City of Jersey Village is taking the lead in protecting its residents, their homes, and local businesses from flooding.
Q What is a home-rule city charter?
A A home-rule city charter is the fundamental law of a home-rule city. Its relationship to the city is similar to the Constitution and the laws of the State. However, a city charter may not contain any provision inconsistent with the Texas Constitution or state law. Tex. Const. Art. XI, §5.

Q Why would a city want to become home-rule?
A The Texas Constitution, in Article XI, Section 5, grants the power of local self-government to a home-rule city. A home-rule city may act in a way that is authorized by its charter and not prohibited by state or federal law. This is the opposite of a general law city, which must look to state law for the authority to act. A Home rule-city has broad powers, and its city charter is interpreted by reading it as a whole and harmonizing its various provisions as far as possible, considering every word, phrase, and expression as if each had been deliberately chosen and used for a purpose. Hammond v. City of Dallas, 712 S.W.2d 496, 498 (Tex. 1986). A court will presume a city charter provision valid, and courts will not interfere unless the provision is unreasonable and arbitrary, amounting to a clear abuse of municipal discretion. See City of Brookside Village v. Comeau, 633 S.W. 2d 790, 792 (Tex. 1982). However, if a city charter provision attempts to regulate a subject matter that has been preempted by state law, the charter provision is unenforceable to the extent it conflicts with the state law. See Dallas Merchant’s & Concessionaire’s Ass’n, 852 S.W. 2d 489, 491 (Tex. 1993). To preempt a subject matter, the Legislature must do so with “unmistakable clarity.” Id. Additionally, a court will not hold a state law and a city charter provision repugnant to each other if the court can reach a reasonable construction leaving both in effect. Id. The attorney general has opined that a city attorney bears primary responsibility for interpreting a city’s charter. See Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. JM-805 (1987), at 1 n.1.

Q When can a general law city become a home-rule city?
A Once a general law city has more than 5,000 inhabitants, it is authorized to hold an election to adopt a home-rule city charter. Tex. Const. Art. XI, §5. Although the Texas Constitution
and state law do not define the term “inhabitants,” the Texas Supreme Court has determined that the governing body has the authority to determine the number of inhabitants in a city and that the census count does not necessarily control the determination of population for the purpose of adopting a home-rule charter. State v. City of La Porte, 386 S.W.2d 782, 785 (Tex. 1965). Absent proof of fraud, bad faith or abuse of discretion, the governing body’s ascertainment of the number of inhabitants in the city is presumed to be valid. Id.; but see City of Granite Shoals v. Winder, 280 S.W. 3d 550, 554 (Tex. App.–Austin 2009, pet. denied) (finding that the city failed to make a good-faith effort to comply with the inhabitancy requirement when it willfully manipulated its “water tap” calculation in order to produce the desired figure and its determination of inhabitancy was reached despite - or in conscious disregard of - evidence that the city’s actual inhabitancy figure was far below 5,000). As such, a city with a population, according to the federal census, that is less than 5,000 should consult with a population expert to help the city determine the number of inhabitants in the city. Nonetheless, a city that has adopted a home-rule city charter does not lose its home-rule status and may still amend its charter if the number of inhabitants in the city falls below 5,000. Tex. Const. Art. XI, §5.

Q When is an election to select a charter commission held?

A The election to select the charter commission must be held on the city’s next general election (must be on an authorized uniform election date) scheduled after the 30th day but on or before the 90th day after council adopts the ordinance ordering the election. Id. §9.002(b). If no general election is scheduled during that time period that allows sufficient time to comply with other requirements of the law, the election shall be ordered for the first authorized uniform election date that allows sufficient time to comply with other requirements of the law and that occurs after the 30th day after the date the ordinance is adopted and published in a newspaper that is published in the city. Id.; Tex. Elec. Code §41.001.

Q What happens after a charter commission is selected?

A After the charter commission is selected, the charter commission must prepare a charter, and to the extent practicable, the charter shall be prepared so that each subject may be voted on separately. Id. §9.003(c). Once the proposed charter is prepared, city council must then submit it to the qualified voters of the city for a vote. Id. §9.003(a). City council shall also order the city clerk or city secretary to
mail a copy of the proposed charter to each registered voter of the city before the 30th day before the date of the charter election. *Id.* §9.003(b).

**Q** When is an election to vote on a charter held?

**A** An election to vote on the charter must be held on the first authorized uniform election date that allows sufficient time to comply with other requirements of law and that occurs on or after the 40th day after the date the charter commission completes its work. *Id.* Additionally, before the 30th day before the election date, city council shall order the municipal clerk or the city secretary to mail a copy of the proposed charter to each registered voter of the city. *Id.* §9.003. Voters may simultaneously elect persons to hold office under the new charter while also voting on the charter election. *Id.* §9.006. A city charter is adopted when it is approved by a majority of the qualified voters of the city who voted at the charter election. *Id.* §9.005.

**Q** Can a city amend its charter?

**A** Yes. The Texas Constitution empowers a city to amend its charter in any manner which it may desire, so long as it does not conflict with the Constitution and state law. Tex. Const. Art. XI, §5; *Davis v. City of Taylor*, 67 S.W. 2d 1033 (1934). Approval of a charter amendment requires approval by a majority of the qualified voters of the city who vote at an election held for that purpose. Tex. Local Gov't Code §9.005(a). Additionally, the attorney general has opined that a home-rule charter cannot provide that it may be amended by an ordinance alone rather than by voter approval. Tex. Att'y Gen. Op. No. GA-433 (2006).

**Q** How is a charter amendment initiated?

**A** A charter amendment may be initiated by city council, which, on its own motion, may order an election for the purpose of submitting a proposed charter amendment to the qualified voters of the city for a vote. *Id.* §9.004(a). Conversely, city council is required to order such an election if it receives a proposed charter amendment that is supported by a petition signed by at least five percent of the qualified voters of the city or 20,000 qualified voters, whichever number is less. *Id.* But see, *City of Galena Park v. Ponder*, 503 S.W. 3d 625, (Tex. App. – Houston [14th Dist.] 2016) (the manner of submission of the election petition materials must conclusively demonstrate that the petition submitted was the one supported by the signatories). When the requirements of a petition are met, the proposed amendments must be put to a vote, and the duty of the members of city council to do so is a ministerial one. *See Coalson v. City Council of Victoria*, 610 S.W. 2d 744, 747 (Tex. 1980); *Green v. City of Lubbock*, 627 S.W. 2d 868, 872 (Tex. App. – Amarillo 1981); *In re Roof*, 130 S.W. 3d 414 (Tex. App. – Houston [14th Dist.] 2004) (city secretary cannot refuse to submit petition to city council because of alleged conflict with state law). Further, State law provides that the proposed amendment may not contain more than one subject. *Id.* §9.004(d). However, one court has determined that this provision does not expressly prohibit a charter amendment petition from proposing more than one amendment, finding that the language of the ballot proposition is not the responsibility of the petitioner. *See City of Galena Park*, 503 S.W.3d at 634-35.

The city is also required to prepare the ballot in such a way that a voter may approve or disapprove any one or more amendments without having to approve or disapprove all of the amendments. *Id.* §9.006(e); Tex. Election Code §52.072(a).

**Q** Is a city required to appoint or elect a charter review commission to prepare a charter amendment?

**A** State law does not require that a charter review commission be appointed or elected to prepare a charter amendment. *Id.* §9.004(a). Additionally, the Texas Supreme Court has concluded that charter amendments do not require the appointment or reelection of a city charter commission. *Yett v. Cook*, 281 S.W. 837, 838 (Tex. 1926). But, some charters require the selection of a charter review commission, and most cities prefer to utilize one. If the charter contains provisions for utilizing a charter review commission, the city must follow those provisions. Otherwise, city council may establish a charter review commission, determine the size of such a commission, and is free to accept, reject, or modify any and all recommendations made by the commission.
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TEXAS SCULPTURE GARDEN
Q **When can a city hold a charter amendment election?**

A City council must order a charter amendment election be held on the first authorized uniform election date prescribed by the Election Code or on the earlier of the date of the next municipal general election or presidential general election. *Id.* §9.004. The election date must allow sufficient time to comply with other requirements of law and must occur on or after the 30th day after the date the ordinance ordering the election is adopted. *Id.*

Q **What notice must the city provide regarding a charter amendment election?**

A The city must publish a notice of a charter amendment election in a newspaper of general circulation that is published in the city. *Id.* The notice must: (1) include a substantial copy of the proposed amendment; (2) include an estimate of the anticipated fiscal impact to the city if the proposed amendment is approved at the election; and (3) be published on the same day in each of two successive weeks, with the first publication occurring before the 14th day before the date of the election. *Id.*

Q **When does a charter or charter amendment go into effect?**

A A charter or charter amendment goes into effect when the city council enters an order in the records of the city declaring that the charter or charter amendment is adopted. *Id.* §9.005. As soon as practicable after the city adopts a charter or amendment, the mayor or the chief executive officer of the city shall certify to the secretary of state an authenticated copy of the charter under the city’s seal showing the approval of the charter or amendment by the voters of the city. *Id.* §9.007. One court has determined that the mayor’s role in certifying the charter election is ministerial and not dependent on whether the governing body has entered an order declaring that the charter is adopted. *In re Robinson*, 175 S.W. 3d 821 (Tex. App. – Houston [1st Dist.] 2005, no pet.).

The secretary of state is required to file and record the certification in the secretary of state’s office in a book kept for that purpose. *Id.* §9.007. Also, the city secretary or another officer performing similar functions to those of a city secretary shall record the adopted charter or amendment in the city secretary’s or officer’s office. *Id.* §9.008. If the charter or amendment is not recorded on microfilm, it must be recorded in a book kept for that purpose. *Id.* Recorded charters or amendments are public acts, and a court is required to take judicial notice of such charter or amendment without requiring proof of their provisions. *Id.*

Q **How often may a city amend its charter?**

A The Texas Constitution provides that a city charter shall not be altered, amended or repealed more often than every two years. *Tex. Const. Art. XI, §5; Berka v. City of Lewisville*, 818 S.W. 2d 891, 892 (Tex. App. – Ft. Worth 1991) (plain language the Constitution prohibits the holding of an election to amend the city charter within a two year period after last charter election irrespective of whether the amendment would be effective outside the two-year period). The term “year” refers to a calendar year, which equals 365 days or 366 days in a leap year. *Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. JM-466 (1986).*

Q **Must a city charter commission be selected if a city wants to adopt a completely new charter?**

A Yes. When a city that has previously adopted a charter decides to completely rewrite its charter and adopt a new charter, a charter commission must be elected. *Tex. Local Gov’t Code §9.002(a).* The definition of a “completely new charter” (as opposed to the city’s first charter) has not been litigated, but various cases have concluded that the amendment of some charter provisions, but not all, constitutes a charter amendment as distinguished from a new charter. *See Ex rel City of West Orange City v. City of Orange*, 300 S.W. 2d 706, 711 (Tex. App. – Beaumont 1957); *Yett*, 281 S.W. 837 at 838.
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11:00 am registration

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www.txabccm.org
Each year, the Texas Municipal League (TML) conducts a fiscal conditions survey of its member cities. With an unexpected public health crisis and an economic recession, most cities will have to make difficult decisions over the coming months. This is why TML created a special-edition, mid-year fiscal conditions survey to help cities navigate the upcoming budget planning process. With 552 cities responding, the survey demonstrates that the Coronavirus pandemic has impacted cities significantly.

Cities are the government closest to the people and play a significant role in the quality of life and emergency response for communities. Citizens benefit from the core services that cities provide, such as public safety (EMS, fire, and police), streets, parks, public transportation, libraries, utilities, and other vital services. Those services are funded by property taxes and other sources of revenue.

With little financial assistance from the state, cities are tasked to manage growth or decline and rely on their own capacity to generate revenue. The state provides almost no funding for the provision of city services. In fact, Texas ranks 47 out of the 50 states in the amount of state-generated revenue as a percentage of their budgets. In planning its own revenue mix, each city is different and will need to make decisions based upon any number of factors, such as the impact of COVID-19 on other sources of local revenue like sales taxes, the amount of city expenditures made in response to the emergency, as well as the ability and willingness of local taxpayers to potentially pay a given property tax rate.

Survey results show that 67 percent of cities are choosing not to change their property tax rate. Only 14 percent of cities are estimating a raise in their tax rate. Further, over half are projecting to adopt the “no new revenue rate,” which used to be called the “effective rate” prior to Senate Bill 2 from 2019. Of cities that plan to exceed the no new revenue rate, the median increase is projected to be 3.5 percent according to the survey.

In recent months, cities are not only responding to a public health crisis, but they have taken a financial hit. Sixty-six percent of cities have lost sales tax revenue due to the pandemic. In addition, more than 50 percent have lost hotel occupancy tax revenue, and 48 percent have lost mixed beverage taxes. Of the responding cities, 28 percent expect next year’s revenue to be lower compared to the current year.

To deal with the current revenue loss, cities have examined what cost-saving measures could be implemented. Twenty-five percent of cities imposed a hiring freeze and 15 percent have frozen wages in the current fiscal year. The survey shows that cities will continue to extend their hiring and wage freeze into the next fiscal year. Twenty-three percent of cities either reduced or eliminated city services. However, only 10 percent of cities expect to reduce or eliminate services in the next fiscal year.

Under the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Relief Fund is to be used for state and local governments in response to the pandemic. Twenty-five percent of all cities have
received such funds. Sixteen percent of cities that received funds received it directly through the United States Treasury Department. Cities in a county of 500,000 or more population were able to receive their money from that county – 29 percent received funds through this avenue. All other cities (except the few with 500,000 or more population that received direct allocation) can draw their funds from the state through the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM), and over half of cities that received funds did so through TDEM.

It is no surprise that Texas and its cities have experienced incredible growth in recent years. Many cities have seen their populations grow by more than 10 percent since 2010, with some experiencing an upwards of 30 percent growth. According to the United States Census, Texas has led the nation in annual population growth for each year between 2010 through 2019. Texas cities have felt that impact. For much of the past decade, seven of the 15 fastest growing cities are located here. Texas surpassed 28 million people in 2017 and is on the verge of surpassing 29 million.

Recent trends have shown populations shifting from rural to urban areas, indicating that cities will experience the majority of the future population growth. The state demographer projects the state’s population will double by 2050. This would mean 25 million more people living in Texas in 30 years. Currently, 74 percent of the Texas population (21.2 million people) live in incorporated areas. Further, 89 percent of Texans (25.6 million people) live in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). In other words, the vast majority of Texans live, work, and play in or around cities. In the last five years, we have seen cities taking on more capital spending to address this growth. Now, we are seeing an incline of cities (30 percent) that are expecting to postpone capital spending as a cost saving measure.

The survey reinforces the notion that no two Texas cities are identical, especially in a crisis. Cities may respond differently to economic conditions and public health emergencies, and that is why the legislature should not impose one-size-fits-all mandates or revenue restrictions on cities. City officials are engaged with residents every day and are the most familiar with local issues. They must have the flexibility to respond to fluctuations in revenue sources and to the different levels of services city taxpayers demand.

The full results contain useful data about how cities with declining revenue plan to respond to those circumstances. View the full results on the TML website at www.tml.org, click on “Resources” and then “Surveys.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipal Revenue</th>
<th>Current Year</th>
<th>Projected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current year revenue lower than last year’s revenue</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current year revenue remained constant to last year’s revenue</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect lower revenue next year</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect revenue to remain constant next year</td>
<td>-</td>
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### Change in Property Tax Rates

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>61.1%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raised Rate</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.8%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced Rate</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City does not levy property tax rate</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
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### Adopted Tax Rate Relative to No New Revenue Rate (Formerly the Effective Tax Rate)

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher than No new revenue rate</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Same as No new revenue rate</td>
<td>57.6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than No new revenue rate</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Percentage of Cities with Lost Revenue Due to COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>June 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales Tax</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotel Occupancy Tax</td>
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<td>Mixed Beverage Tax</td>
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### Average Amount of Lost Revenue (Percentage) Due to COVID-19

<table>
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<tr>
<th>June 2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel Occupancy Tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Beverage Tax</td>
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### Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>June 2020</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Cities that Received Coronavirus Relief Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRF directly from US Treasury Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRF from County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRF by application to Texas Division of Emergency Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Preliminary Agenda for the 108th TML Annual Conference and Exhibition

All conference events will be held virtually. Conference information will be updated as program details are added. Check the conference website at www.tmlconference.org for the most current information.

Tuesday, October 13

2:00 p.m.
TML Board of Directors Meeting

Wednesday, October 14

10:30 a.m.-Noon
Opening General Session and Presentation of Awards
Leadership as an Act of Service
Mark A. Welsh III, Dean, The Bush School of Government & Public Service, Texas A&M University

Noon
TML Municipal Marketplace Grand Opening

1:30-2:30 p.m.
TML Small Cities Advisory Council Meeting

1:30-2:45 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

3:00-4:15 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

3:00-3:30 p.m.
TAMCC Board Meeting

3:30 p.m.-Conclusion
TML Business Meeting
Thursday, October 15

7:30-8:45 a.m.
Update from the Pools:
TML Health and TML Intergovernmental Risk Pool

9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Exhibit Hall

8:00-9:00 a.m.
Continental Breakfast in the Exhibit Hall

8:00-11:45 a.m.
Affiliates’ Board, Business, or Educational Sessions

9:00-10:15 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions

10:30-11:45 a.m.
Concurrent Sessions

2:00-3:15 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

2:00-5:00 p.m.
Affiliates’ Board, Business, or Educational Sessions

3:30-4:45 p.m.
Closing General Session
Shaping Texas’ Future
Margaret Spellings, President and CEO, Texas 2036

Friday, October 16

8:00-10:30 a.m.
2021 Texas Legislative Session Outlook

Noon-1:45 p.m.
Keynote Speaker

Finding the Power of Your Unique Voice
Torin Perez, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Influencer
An epidemic is when a disease spreads over a wide area and many are ill at the same time. A pandemic affects an even wider geographical area and a significant portion of the population. Over the last six months, we have been dealing with the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19. For well more than three centuries, Black Americans have been dealing with an epidemic which has now become a pandemic.

An organism is any individual entity that embodies the properties of life, it is a synonym for “life form” (Wikipedia). Classism is a life form of prejudice against or in favor of people belonging to a particular social class (New Oxford American Dictionary). Sexism is a life form of prejudice, stereotyping or discrimination on the basis of sex (gender). Racism is a life form of prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against a person or group of people based on the belief that one’s own race is superior.

COVID-19 has impacted our city, county, region, state, and country beyond the way in which any widespread virus has in our recent history. This virus did not identify its victims based on any physical or social status commonly used in society. For the first time in more than 100 years, neighborhoods, communities, tribes, villages, towns, cities, counties, regions, and states have come together to seek solutions to protect the physical, economic, and social health of individuals.

With the widespread closure of schools, small businesses, large corporations, retail, restaurants, and houses of worship, our communities were riddled with fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and concern. Many within our profession continue on the front lines, working to ensure that residents do not and did not experience any gaps in service. We made sure that when 911 was dialed that police, fire and/or EMS arrived. We made sure the trash was collected, and that water and wastewater continued without interruption. As plans were being implemented by many states to incrementally reopen business, retail, and restaurants, a century’s old epidemic resurfaced.

The harsh reality is that people of color have endured centuries of physical, fiscal, and social injustices that are now being more openly exposed. Smartphone and camera technology coupled with social media platforms has made it more complicated for mainstream America to ignore.

The horrific images of Mr. George Floyd with the side of his face pinned to the filthy Minneapolis street, uttering the words “I can’t breathe,” before crying “Momma” should make any human feel bothered, hurt, angry, and sad. The undeniable truth is that visual image of his tragic death along with that of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and countless others who have died as a result of racial and social injustices are not a new or uncommon phenomenon for Native Americans, Black Americans, Hispanics, or people of color in general. “We Shall Overcome” was the battle cry of generations past. “I can’t breathe” is the outcry for change that we are hearing today in our communities by countless people of all generations, cultures, socioeconomic status, or political affiliation.

As elected and appointed local government professionals, we serve and adhere to a moral compass and guiding principles inclusive of the oath of office, charter, professional, or organizational code of ethics established to ensure that policies and procedures are adopted and implemented that are equitable for all regardless of political affiliation, gender, socio-economic status, or race. John C. Maxwell said “leadership is seeing the possibilities in a situation while others are seeing the limitations.” As public servants we must embody this principle. While business and industry focus on the bottom line, we are exploring how to ensure the essential services are fulfilled to create a safe, healthy, and resilient community for all residents.
To accomplish the goal of a safe, healthy, resilient, and sustainable community, we must take the time to *Listen, Learn, Love, and Lead*.

Neither the health pandemic nor the racial epidemic is a red, blue, or purple crisis. We must listen to our city/county board, commission, or council who establish our governing policies, our stakeholders who have a vested interest in the impact and outcome of the policies and procedures, and our hired experts (staff) who are committed to the community. We have to listen intently, intentionally, and consciously to what is being stated.

We must learn from our past mistakes, failures, and successes. Change is uncomfortable, and uncomfortable conversations about an individual’s physical health and race have often been labeled taboo discussions. However, if we fail to have these conversations, we cannot and will not learn and grow. We will be stagnant. There is a lesson to be learned from every situation, whether you win or lose. Emergency management drills and protocols should become regular practice within our organizations to ensure we are better prepared to respond to the next health crisis. Training is learning to ensure that we are aware of unintentional and unconscious bias that everyone possess. Learn to have the conversation. Speak up when you hear or see something that is not morally or ethically right.

Love is an overly used word. To love is to show action. To love our organization is being willing to be a bright light in a dark room. Love is recognizing that all people should have personal experiences that are reflective of their legal status that “all men are created equal.” To love our organization is to ensure physical, fiscal, and social injustices are not inflicted on individuals because of their gender, socio-economic status, or race.

When we intently listen, genuinely learn, and actively love, we will effectively lead our organizations through this crisis and tumultuous environment to a changed community that can be enjoyed by all. We can and will implement policies and procedures that will have lasting impact and change for the better.

Arnold Bennett said “any change, even change for the better, is always accompanied by discomforts.” Be uncomfortable and let’s be the change. ★

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BEAUTIFICATION IN LONGVIEW

By Kim Casey, Executive Director, Keep Longview Beautiful

Greenday - Directors repainted art in the music garden
Beautiful. Clean. Progressive. These are words that citizens want to hear when describing their community’s greenspaces, streets, business parks, and neighborhoods. Hearing those remarks means a city is ecologically relevant, which Americans categorize in high regard for their desired places to live, work, and play. Beautification programs are packed with tools that communities can adopt to encourage environmental participation, promote kinship, and foster neighborhood pride. Keep Longview Beautiful was established with these precise goals in mind.

The Longview Beautiful Association started in 1979 with a few enthusiastic volunteers who simply envisioned cleaner and more attractive spaces within their community. Focusing on beautification, this group quickly went to work. Landscape beds were cleaned, a median was adopted, and flowers were planted. Strength in numbers and pride began to flourish. This small alliance grew to become what it is today: Keep Longview Beautiful, a highly regarded working operation that is a Gold Star affiliate of Keep Texas Beautiful and Keep America Beautiful.

Borrowing from their roots, the board of directors keeps a tight and busy schedule. The third Saturday of every month is known as “Greenday.” This scheduled work day provides more than 750 hours of preservation, funding more than $19,000 in economic impact to the City of Longview. Whether improving Judson Median with annual plantings, reclaiming a littered neighborhood, or maintaining any of their 21 pieces of outdoor ART from the heART installations, these impassioned people are improving Longview.

Keep Longview Beautiful is a stand-alone nonprofit. Three pronged in mission, the organization focuses on improving waste management, litter abatement, and beautification. Funding comes from donations, grants, and awards won. The City of Longview is gracious in providing one paid employee that serves as executive director, office space, and the accompanying business accoutrement. In the past seven years, this beautification program has delivered over $3 million dollars of financial investment to Longview. Each year, new projects are begun and previous events are improved upon for the betterment of the community.
Nothing stays stagnant, everything is variable. Fluidity and open minds push the advancement of the public’s environment to the forefront of every endeavor.

Waste management is a chief component of Keep Longview Beautiful’s mission. By teaching citizens the straightforward facts that reducing consumption of everyday items and reusing products to their fullest extent, they begin to understand the garbage stream can exponentially shrink and more economical waste solutions are built. Finally, recycling comes into play, as the cleanup pitcher. When performed properly, these three actions - reducing, reusing, and recycling - are an effortless way to decrease landfill usage, create a healthier planet, and promote proper waste control. ‘Green Training’ for businesses and schools gives meaning to employees and students that everyone - big or small, kindergartener to retiree - will impact the environment. Discussions with these groups have evolved into successful corporate waste plans, local outdoor events, and super star environmentalists who support the enhancement and rich beauty of their city. Event leaders are challenged to decrease single use elements such as plastic ware and dated marketing materials. Custom recycle bins, a gift to the community, adorn Heritage Plaza in the heart of downtown. Perhaps Keep Longview Beautiful’s biggest kudo to date in the waste management realm is the City of Longview agreeing to discontinue use of Styrofoam cups in city-owned facilities. Seemingly a small step, this has deleted a large supply of non-biodegradable items, thus removing the product from encroaching on landfill space.

Litter issues plague nearly all cities. The national Litter Index, a windshield study created by Keep America Beautiful, is performed within Longview each year. Seven diverse volunteers visit 50 different areas within the City’s limits to ascertain how litter is trending. Indicators for Longview have increased in recent years which encouraged the design of an innovative litter abatement program, “A Less Littered Longview” that will kick off later this year. Taking on a street cleanup four times per year under the Adopt a Street program averages 6.12 tons of debris cleaned from streets, greenspaces and neighborhoods. The Independent Sector estimates the national rate of volunteer time at $25.43 per hour. Volunteer service for the Adopt a Street program is valued at $36,238. Green Machines parades visit elementary schools to educate students about the equipment used to maintain the city properly. Recycle trucks, bulky pickup vehicles and street sweepers flaunt past children who scream in delight. Educating in this way helps keep environmental stewardship in the forefront of children’s minds.

Beautification is the final and perhaps easiest to access component in the mission of Keep Longview Beautiful.
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Beautification projects such as landscape and art installations are highly visible and attract visitors, businesses, and the pride of residents. Previously mentioned, ART from the heART is simply about gifting Longview with the unique inheritance of outdoor art. Since its inception in 2014, the program has supported twenty-one installations of art with another phenomenal structure currently in design. Sanitation trucks travel the streets with student art decorating their sides. Trees are also an integral outdoor aesthetic with underlying health benefits. The Municipal Tree Project encourages participants to plant trees that will clean the air, reduce energy costs, curb storm runoff, and raise property values. More than 400 trees have been added to the city’s greenspaces, thus enhancing a tree canopy that will have positive effects for generations to come. Judson median was adopted by the group’s early ancestors and, throughout the last five years, the nonprofit has invested more than $40,000 in major improvements. Located in the heart of Longview, this median has sparked nearby businesses to enhance their facades trying to earn Beautification Awards, which have become a highly sought after honor. Green Ribbon projects with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) have garnered 16 new landscape projects. Three entryway signs and a new community sign grace the right-of-ways in Longview because Keep Longview Beautiful has won the coveted Governor’s Community Achievement Award several times, which is funded by TxDOT and managed by Keep Texas Beautiful.

From humble beginnings in 1976, that small charitable association gave birth to the ecological powerhouse that has now become Keep Longview Beautiful. The organization’s multi-faceted approach within the environmental spectrum is reaping benefits throughout their community and advancing Longview into a place people want to live and visit. Keep Longview Beautiful’s largest gift to the community yet is a nine acre greenspace called The Green. This $1.3 million venue was designed and paid for by fundraising efforts of the nonprofit. Boasting nine art installations, a half-mile walking trail, music garden, and event pavilion, The Green has proven that art, culture, health, and outdoor education are paramount to the lives of East Texans. Citizens have begun to convey a true sense of pride and interest in movement toward more transformation for the community. Beautification programs encourage growth, and cities around America are providing this vehicle for citizens to be part of something that will truly improve their quality of life. When a town makes the effort to create environmental improvements, they are stating their interest in wanting new businesses, more residents and attractive, clean locations for visitors.

Community Services Director Laura Hill commented, “Keep Longview Beautiful is a continual benefit to the Longview community in myriad ways. Whether shepherding and expanding the Adopt a Street Program, installing ART from the heART sculptures, and commemorative playscapes at their signature project The Green, Keep Longview Beautiful continues to guide the way in making Longview a more attractive and caring community.”

Longview thrives as a jewel in northeast Texas and Keep Longview Beautiful is proud to lead the city as an environmental advocate.
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For more than 30 years, Keep Texas Beautiful, in partnership with the Texas Department of Transportation, has awarded the prestigious Governor’s Community Achievement Awards (GCAA) to Texas communities for their outstanding overall efforts to keep their communities beautiful.

The GCAA is one of the most coveted annual environmental and community improvement honors in Texas. Read on to learn about our 2020 recipients and the community projects they accomplished to help win them this recognition. Interested in applying? Visit www.ktb.org/gcaa and start preparing for the 2021 GCAA opening in January 2021.
**Category 1: South Padre Island**  
**Population up to 3,000**  
**Landscape Award: $90,000**

The City of South Padre Island is full of maritime and Texas history. Though the island is small, it attracts up to 100,000 visitors a day.

Fortunately, the community is united in their efforts to keep the island beautiful. During the “ Treasure It, Don’t Trash It” anti-litter program in 2019, 33,568 beachgoers were educated on the importance of litter prevention.

South Padre Island is unique because of its location near the border and its many Spanish-speaking residents. Last year, the City reached more than 1,000 Spanish speaking volunteers resulting in over 10,000 pounds of trash removed from Texas beaches. Their litter battle is being won every day by dedicated residents and support from the City.

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**Category 2: Weston Lakes**  
**Population 3,001-5,500**  
**Landscape Award: $110,000**

The City of Weston Lakes is a small city outside of Houston with a population of 3,346. In recent years, the City and its surrounding area has experienced exponential growth, making environmental protection that much more important.

With help from Keep Weston Lakes Beautiful (KWLB), residents have been committed to unique projects that strengthen the community and beautify its spaces. In 2019, KWLB and its volunteers oversaw the litter prevention of approximately 35 city street miles collecting more than 1.6 tons of litter.

Carol Fairbank, the President of KWLB said that GCAA has “given our organization and City such a sense of overwhelming pride and achievement and we are incredibly grateful.”

Weston Lakes is also committed to educating and engaging volunteers of all ages. Last year, KWLB hosted four summer educational programs, totaling 161 youth participants. The curriculum included learning about Texas native birds, Monarch butterfly migration and life cycle, and building fish habitats.
Category 3: Lago Vista
Population 5,501-9,000
Landscape Award: $130,000

The City of Lago Vista is a small hill country community located in Travis County. The City has experienced new growth that brings with it the challenges of controlling population impacts and developing programs for the expanded growth. Lago Vista City Manager, Joshua Ray, says winning the GCAA “is a true testament to our City and the way we work together.”

The City and Keep Lago Vista Beautiful work together to develop community improvement plans, including artwork placed throughout the city, town square development, litter prevention, and a recycling center. The entire community is involved in programs involving beautification and litter prevention. In 2019, their spring cleanup resulted in 460 loads of litter picked up.

Environmental efforts are a community-building exercise in Lago Vista that have increased hometown pride.

Category 4: Levelland
Population 9,001-15,000
Landscape Award: $160,000

Levelland is located on the Llano Estacado, 30 miles west of Lubbock. Levelland’s beautification efforts have been hindered over the years by questions of who is responsible for the litter and debris along the railroad that runs through the City. But great progress has been made with efforts from the City and Keep Levelland Beautiful (KLB).

The railroad, City, and State have worked together to clean up debris and develop sustainability plans along the railroad tracks. In addition, KLB implemented the Bungalow Beautification Project, which allowed for less attractive railroad bungalows to be wrapped with art designs that depict the local area.

The City and KLB decided to name “beautification” a major pillar of Levelland. This signifies the value and dedication the community places in keeping their City a beautiful place to live, work, and play.
**Category 5: White Settlement**  
**Population 15,001-25,000**  
**Landscape Award: $180,000**

A suburb of Fort Worth, White Settlement maintains a hometown feel with the added benefit of being in close proximity to big city amenities. In partnership with organizations like Keep White Settlement Beautiful (KWSB), the City focuses its future on sustainable growth and resident involvement in community improvement.

In 2019, the City installed a local community garden where residents apply for and are assigned garden beds to grow flowers and fresh produce. White Settlement also keeps its community litter free through programs that include Adopt a Street, community cleanup events, and Ten on Tuesday (a program inviting residents to pick up 10 pieces of litter every Tuesday).

“Winning the GCAA brings some positive attention to our community and helps us show the state how special White Settlement is,” said Lacey Alexander, KWSB affiliate coordinator.

**Category 6: Alvin**  
**Population 25,001-40,000**  
**Landscape Award: $210,000**

Located 30 miles south of Houston, Alvin is rich in history. Although the City is currently seeing significant growth, it remains a friendly, caring community that is focused on sustainability.

Keep Alvin Beautiful (KAB) leads many community improvement projects which involve the entire community. Cleanup initiatives in 2019 resulted in 72.9 tons of trash and brush collected with help from 550 volunteers.

In addition, the Alvin Independent School District with its 6,000 employees and 23,000 students completed a project called “The Day” in 2019, where over 200 community projects were completed. The City also has several programs to reach diverse and under-served citizens such as a food pantry, clothing outlet, low cost dental services, little libraries, and community gardens.

“Winning the GCAA has encouraged our volunteers, City employees, and officials to continue their efforts to improve our community,” says Alice Sloan, President of KAB.
Category 7: The Colony  
**Population 40,001-65,000**  
**Landscape Award: $250,000**

The Colony is 25 miles north of Dallas and is known as “The City by the Lake,” since it is adjacent to Lake Lewisville. The City, along with Keep The Colony Beautiful and other local organizations, partner to promote programs on litter prevention, beautification, habitat restoration, community improvement, and waste reduction.

City-wide cleanups are held annually in the spring and fall. In 2019, these events involved 850 households picking up 25 tons of bulky debris, 100 tires, and 29,000 pounds of paper for shredding. Another unique program is “The Colony Cares” tool lending program, offering tools and equipment to residents to beautify their properties.

“The City of The Colony is extremely proud to receive this award,” Mayor Joe McCourry said. “It is reflective of the relentless efforts by both our residents and city staff to promote beautification and green-living in our community year after year. We look forward to applying this grant toward further beautification of our community.”

Category 8: Harlingen  
**Population 65,001-90,000**  
**Landscape Award: $270,000**

Harlingen is considered the Capital of the Rio Grande Valley and has served as the heart of industry and agriculture for well over a century. Like many places in Texas, Harlingen continues to grow, but this growth brings its share of challenges.

With help from Keep Harlingen Beautiful (KHB), the City aims to keep a clean environment and maintain the parks, highways, roadways, and neighborhoods. KHB works enthusiastically to educate the community about litter prevention, solid waste reduction, graffiti abatement, and beautification.

In 2019, KHB hosted Harlingen’s “Making A Difference” Day, where 200 oak trees were given away and 700 pounds of litter was collected. Melissa Boykin, the executive director of KHB, said the award is a testament to the hard work and collaboration of local organizations, residents, and the City.
**Category 9: Tyler**  
**Population 90,001-180,000**  
**Landscape Award: $290,000**

Known as the “Rose Capital of America,” Tyler is located in the regional northeast area of Texas and has a population of 107,151. “I think what sets our community apart from others is that our citizens are really proud to live in Tyler,” says Angela Bennis, Keep Tyler Beautiful (KTB) recreational manager.

KTB and the Tyler Trees Committee hosted four Arbor Day events in 2019 where 667 volunteers planted 1,151 trees. In addition, KTB’s 2019 spring cleanup hosted 320 volunteers who cleaned up 6,025 pounds of litter from parks, roads, and dump sites.

Bennis attributes the success of the City’s community improvement efforts to the involvement of Tyler residents. The City, with help from KTB, a youth advisory council, and many local organizations, is able to mobilize thousands of volunteers and engage the entire community.

**Category 10: Grand Prairie**  
**Population 180,001+**  
**Landscape Award: $310,000**

Centrally located in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Grand Prairie has a population of 193,837, with as many as 30 percent of residents speaking Spanish. With such a diverse population, community improvement programs are a city-wide effort.

In 2019, Grand Prairie hosted their third annual Big Event, resulting in over 1,547 volunteers contributing to the beautification of 101 work sites, including sites that served the elderly, low-income residents, and school campuses.

Another Grand Prairie initiative, the Plastic Free Plan-It program, encouraged the community to reduce, reuse, and recycle their single-use plastics. This program resulted in a 93 percent increase in plastic recycling and a 157 percent increase in aluminum recycling.

In addition, new initiatives were launched in 2019 to enhance the appearance of public spaces and green areas through community-wide art. Such initiatives are helping to restore pride and volunteerism throughout the Grand Prairie community.
1. **Find the light.**
Photography is more about light than anything else; natural light is the number one key to beautiful photographs. So put you and your subject in a well-lit natural light area. If you’re photographing a building or landscape, the best time to photograph them is sunrise or sunset. Try to avoid high noon; and if you can, get the light behind you and shining on your subject.

2. **Follow the rule of thirds.**
Mentally divide your view into thirds, horizontally and vertically. Then, put your important subjects along those lines. For a visual, you can actually turn these gridlines on:
   - iPhone: Settings -> Camera -> Grid (toggle on)
   - Android: Open camera app -> Settings -> Gridlines
   - Google Phone: Open camera app -> Menu -> Settings -> Grid (toggle on)

3. **Set the focus.**
When you have your camera app open, point it at your subject. Once you have the light and rule of thirds in order, gently tap your screen on your subject. You’ve just set the focus. Need to readjust? Just frame your photo and tap again. You might notice your screen getting slightly brighter or darker – that means the focus is working and your smartphone is doing the technical stuff behind the scenes.

4. **Say “no” to zoom**
I know it can be tempting, but don’t use your zoom. While camera phones have come a long way over the years, they still aren’t that great with zoom. Just get a little closer to your subject. Your photo will be crisper that way.

5. **Keep it steady.**
Hold your phone with both hands, or better yet, get a small tripod. If you still get a little camera shake, take a few photos in a row and use one of the middle photos with less movement in the image.
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