The Terrebonne to Bayou Vista project, a collaborative effort between Entergy Louisiana and CLECO Power LLC, replaced aging power infrastructure with all-new facilities that are hardened to withstand extreme weather events, such as hurricanes.

An ACEC Texas member firm delivered the project, which spanned 36 miles and is part of a comprehensive systemwide capital program to improve reliability throughout southeast Louisiana.
Official Publication of the Texas Municipal League.

This publication assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors in signed articles. It is not operated for pecuniary gain.

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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.

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ABOUT THE COVER

The cover photo is a rendering of Cedar Park’s Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Project, a public-private partnership.
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. 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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TML Intergovernmental Risk Pool
Jeffrey Snyder, City Manager, Plainview
Dear Texas City Official,

I’m very excited to write this first message to you as I begin my year as TML president. And what a year it will be—with the Texas legislature reconvening in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it will present challenges like none in recent memory. But our cities and city officials will be up to those challenges.

This issue of the magazine is about something I value as a mayor—community engagement and resilience. Inside are great articles about citizens’ academies, online engagement, partnering with business and developers, All-America cities, and much more. Engaging our citizens is perhaps the key to tackling challenges like protecting local control at the Capitol; we can’t do it alone as city officials. Our residents know the non-partisan value that city government brings to their lives and businesses, and it’s up to us to help motivate them to be our advocates.

At the League, we are in the process of visiting each of TML’s 15 regions in the form of virtual legislative roundtables. I’ve already seen many regions interact positively with their legislative delegations, and I am cautiously optimistic. With the 2021 legislative session right around the corner, nothing is more effective than making those contacts and forging relationships before we have to go to the Capitol to ask for something specific. Invite your senator to review the city budget with you. Take your representative on a tour of your city’s new development. The opportunities are limitless, but it is imperative that we take those first steps now.

During the course of this year, I want the League and myself to be as accessible to you as possible. Don’t hesitate to reach out to me or staff with your concerns. Know that it’s very likely I’ll be reaching out to you as well when things get moving at the Capitol, whether it be to call or email your delegation, or even a request to come to Austin to testify on important bills. It’s each of us, the grassroots, that make up the League after all, and only by working together will we get through this year with our ability to serve our citizens intact.

Karen Hunt
Mayor, City of Coppell
TML President
TML Annual Conference Program Is Online Through January

The 2020 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition was held virtually on October 14-16. If you missed the event, you can still register and view all recorded keynotes and sessions through January 31. Visit https://tmlconference.org.

Browse the Municipal Marketplace

Discover a mecca of municipal products and resources for your city from the comfort of your workspace. The TML Municipal Marketplace is an interactive online catalogue of resources, services, and products designed exclusively for the Texas city official. Visit the Marketplace and enjoy complimentary access, curated content, special offers, a dynamic search engine, and no dress code! The Marketplace opened on October 14 and is available to Texas cities through January 31 at https://bit.ly/2020TMLMarketplace.

Sponsors Step Up for Texas Cities

TML is grateful to our dedicated sponsors for their support in bringing the 2020 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition to life – virtually! More than 60 TML sponsors generously invested in the future of Texas cities through their participation. Get to know these superstars at https://tmlexhibits.org/2020-sponsor-recognition.

Cities Are Essential to Post-Pandemic Recovery

The Texas Municipal League Economic Development Conference will take place virtually this year on Thursday, December 10. This full-day conference will help your city leaders improve economic growth and resilience, and encourage investment in your community. Preview the program and register at www.tmleconomicdevelopment.org.

Economic Development Handbook

The Texas Municipal League Economic Development Handbook (2020) compiles the state’s economic development laws in one, convenient publication. It is intended to inform Texas cities about the wide range of
legal tools that are available to local communities. Download your copy at www.tml.org/183/publications.

Stay Informed on the Important Legislative Issues

The 87th session of the Texas Legislature begins on January 12, and could be transformative. A session where state lawmakers and local governments sort out roles and determine how cities can be partners with the state in meeting the needs of local taxpayers. The pandemic is demonstrating that cities can focus on local needs in a responsive way that the state cannot. Participate in our legislative webinar series and wrap-up workshop to learn what issues are likely to be priorities, and how TML will work with you and other city leaders to protect your ability to serve your community. Learn more at https://tmllegislativeseries.org.

Let’s Stay Connected

Is there someone new at the city, or do you need to update an email address? Now is the time to review the information we have listed for your city. Staying connected to you is our number one priority, and updating your information is simple—visit https://www.tml.org/593/TML-Membership-Update.

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, register for and view the virtual Annual Conference sessions or attend the December Economic Development Conference. Remember that training must be taken by December 31, and requests for 2020 CEUs must be received no later than January 8, 2021 to be considered. Contact TMLI@tml.org with any questions.★
The actions (or inactions) of employees are usually reflective of the philosophies, values, and culture of an organization and its leadership. This includes projected attitudes and behaviors. These intentions are often communicated through written standards and observed practices. Considering the current social environment surrounding public safety, the importance of sound procedures and practices has never been more crucial.

Both the Texas Police Chiefs Association (TPCA) and the Texas Fire Chiefs Association (TFCA) have created voluntary programs designed to assist public safety agencies in developing meaningful and legally vetted policies, procedures, and work practices that help with providing services efficiently, effectively, and safely. Both programs recognize agencies that meet the standardized criteria and compliance with program requirements. While similar to national accreditation programs, the TPCA and TFCA best practices recognition programs are easier to administer, cost much less, and are designed specifically for Texas public safety agencies.

Understanding the correlation of strong policies to risk reduction and loss prevention, the Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool has partnered with TPCA and TFCA the past several years to help fund initial dues for entities entering the recognition process. Given the arduous process of developing policies and procedures, a major advantage of these programs is the availability of vetted sample policies and procedures. Both recognition programs help with the process through additional resources, including checklists, administrative guides, and other program manager tools designed to ensure ease of use.

**TPCA**
Since its inception in 2006, 168 agencies statewide and more than 100 Risk Pool member entities have attained “Recognized” status in the TPCA program, with another 35 agencies currently enrolled and in process. To be considered for TPCA recognition, entities must demonstrate implementation and compliance with over 160 best practices, which were carefully developed by Texas law enforcement professionals. Recognized status is evaluated each year. Comprehensive reviews, including additional on-site visits by TPCA recognition program committee representatives, occur every four years. Agencies receiving such accolades have undertaken careful internal reviews of policies, procedures, equipment, facilities, and operations. This process helps ensure the safety of officers and assure the public that the best possible standards for operation are in place.

**TFCA**
The TFCA program has 23 “Recognized” agencies with another 29 registered and working toward that status. Although not all enrolled agencies have attained recognition, many are systematically adopting and implementing policies to improve operational practices and performance. The TFCA recognition program requires departments to meet best practices covering 12 broad areas of operations and administration designed to encourage fire departments in Texas to seek continual improvement of services to their
local communities. TFCA worked closely with progressive fire officers throughout Texas to create a program that defines a route to organizational excellence that ultimately enhances firefighter safety, long-term planning, standard operating guidelines, deployment analysis, risk management, and other administrative functions. These best practices provide clear guidance for departments to achieve and be recognized for excellence validated by independent industry experts. The TFCA program is available to paid, combination, and entirely volunteer fire organizations. The TFCA program will also help facilitate progress toward national accreditation for those seeking this designation.

While public safety departments provide essential services to the community, the completion of either of these designations is an extraordinary achievement. It will help demonstrate a department’s willingness to be recognized as one of the very best in the State of Texas. Achieving recognition, or even working toward it, can also positively affect and influence the general public, city managers, elected officials, and peers, which can provide much-needed support and backing should the need arise. This drive towards operational excellence is why the Risk Pool values these programs and is proud to partner with these organizations. ★

To learn more about these programs, visit:
Texas Police Chiefs Association Best Practices Recognition Program
https://www.texaspolicechiefs.org/recognition-program
Texas Fire Chiefs Association Best Practices Recognition Program
https://txfirechiefs.org/best-practices
Texas Municipal League Intergovernmental Risk Pool

We’re Olsson, engineers who understand that where there’s a project, there’s a purpose. Find out how we transformed six blocks of brownfields into a bustling entertainment district at olsson.com.
AN UNEXPECTED CATALYST FOR PATIENT ENGAGEMENT

As the pandemic temporarily closed elective in-person healthcare and patients continued to prefer remote care once clinics reopened, the percentage of doctor visits conducted by telemedicine increased from an average of 28 percent in 2019 to 69 percent at the height of the pandemic in July, according to data from Epic, the nation’s largest electronic health record vendor.

Even as clinics reopen across Texas and the nation, asynchronous communication such as messaging platforms and real-time virtual healthcare such as video visits continue to reduce the risk of infection. As the pandemic wanes, the reduced risk can continue to benefit patients who are immunosuppressed, those who need postoperative care, and others at particular risk.

For this reason and for the ease of access, demand for telemedicine use remains well above pre-pandemic levels.

Patient Engagement Benefits

Telemedicine increases access to care for many patients, including patients in rural locations who may otherwise face long drives to reach specialists with expertise in their particular conditions. These virtual visits can also decouple the doctor visit from the need to arrange for childcare, transportation, or significant time off of work. This makes it easier for more patients to get the healthcare they need with less missed work and fewer delays that can cause conditions to worsen.

Perhaps most importantly for long-term patient engagement in their own disease management, telemedicine reduces barriers to frequent contact between patients and their healthcare providers, allowing better condition monitoring, investigation and mitigation of reasons that patients may not be adhering to their treatment plans. and the ability for patients to get their questions answered without turning to search engine queries that may yield less than reliable results. Much of the discussion of technological advances in condition monitoring has focused on take-home devices that monitor blood sugar, blood pressure, or other vital markers, but the virtual visit allows for more human healthcare than impersonal data points on a screen.

Ongoing Challenges

Even as telemedicine use is at an all-time high, the American Academy of Family Physicians worries that the way in which virtual care has been adopted at high speed during the pandemic steers patients increasingly toward virtual-only telehealth vendors and large medical systems that already had established telehealth infrastructure.

In order for telemedicine to benefit patients in the long term – especially those with complex or chronic conditions for whom a relationship with a physician familiar with the history and changes of their condition is an important part of getting the right care – cities and public officials will need to promote policies that can help retain telemedicine as a way of expanding and strengthening doctors’ relationships with their patients in the community.

These include expanding public access to broadband internet that can support video consultations, and maintaining the eligibility of medical visits conducted over the phone for payment parity. At the height of the pandemic in Texas, the state issued an emergency rule stating that healthcare professionals would be eligible for payment from health insurance plans regulated by the Texas Department of Insurance for medical visits carried out over the phone instead of in person, at the same rate they would have received for in-person visits.

Preserving reimbursements for telemedicine and expanding access can help maintain new levels of patient engagement in their care, and help make specialty care more widely accessible.

About TML Health Benefits Pool

TML Health Benefits Pool brings together hundreds of Texas public entities to leverage collective purchasing power and risk sharing to offer big-employer health benefits at small-town prices. By sharing in the Pool, TML Health’s members share the rewards of superior health coverage—lower costs, better health outcomes, and more personalized service.

HEALTH POOL NEWS

HEALTH POOL - NEWS

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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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:
Van Tran, CBO | 214.876.6855 | van.tran@bureauveritas.com

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- FORBES MAGAZINE

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HELPING MUNICIPALITIES RESTORE AND REBUILD CONFIDENCE SAFELY.
Amarillo Is Proud to Offer Traveler Safety Kits

Traveling is now more convenient and safe at Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport (RHAIA). Thanks to the generosity of “Taking Flight – Amarillo” Community Partners, “Amarillo Proud” Traveler Safety Kits are available at RHAIA.

“Amarillo Proud” Traveler Safety Kits are free and available to the traveling public. The kits include a black “Amarillo Proud!” cloth mask, a hand sanitizer dispenser, and an additional disposable mask inside a convenient zipper bag. These kits, located near the security screening area of the airport terminal, are free and available to the traveling public.

“We are very proud of the community businesses that have helped to make these kits available to travelers – helping keep people safe during these challenging times when travel is a big question for people,” said City of Amarillo Director of Aviation Michael Conner. “It is this proactive thinking that will continue to grow the airport and the Amarillo community.”

“Taking Flight – Amarillo” is a community-based initiative that is co-sponsored by the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce, Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council and RHAIA.

Edinburg Rewards Census Respondents with Cool Treats

The City of Edinburg drove up Census response rates in areas where the self-response rate was low by deploying a Census Ice Cream Mobile Machine. The ice cream truck, fitted with a laptop, Wi-Fi, and ice cream, offered residents the technical support they needed to complete the Census, while ensuring safe physical distancing for residents and City staff.

The truck was strategically deployed to areas in the community where the response rate lagged. Residents tracked the truck's location and hours through the City’s website, Facebook page, and other social media platforms. Edinburg's website encouraged residents to “come out for a deliciously, cool future when you complete the 2020 Census.”

The City rented the ice cream truck and purchased the treats at minimal cost from an ice cream vendor whose business had been hit hard by the pandemic. It was a pretty sweet deal for all participants.

The Library Comes to You in New Braunfels

The New Braunfels Public Library recently launched a homebound services program for library patrons who are unable to make it to the library due to age, medical concerns, disability, or lack of transportation.

Affectionately named the RIOrover, the transit van was purchased with funds raised earlier this year by the New Braunfels Public Library Foundation with the express intent of enabling the doorstep delivery of library materials.

“Our homebound community members are limited in their ability to access services that others enjoy regularly,” said Outreach Librarian Jonathan Margheim, who also runs the RIOmobile, the library’s bookmobile. “But we don’t want that to be the case with library services. Our mission is to provide the community with equal access to environments that support and encourage lifelong learning and enrichment, and with the RIOrover we can now more actively support part of the community that was harder to reach in the past.”

To be eligible for homebound services, individuals must live in the library’s service area, and possess, or be eligible for, a valid New Braunfels Public library card. Patrons who register via a form on the library’s website are assigned a delivery route based on their residence, and receive library
materials on a scheduled basis. The delivery and return of library materials is contactless, with items dropped off and returned at the front door.

Registered patrons can request library materials by placing holds on items online, via the library’s online book bundle request, a printed request form, or via email. Borrowed items can be returned when new items are delivered.

For more information about homebound services, or other outreach services at the New Braunfels Public Library, visit newbraunfels.libguides.com/RIQ.

Waco Launches Free Financial Service for Residents

The City of Waco, in partnership with Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, launched a free Financial Navigators program in late August to help residents navigate financial issues related to COVID-19, in conjunction with community partners: Heart of Texas Goodwill Industries, the Cen-Tex Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Grassroots Community Development.

Financial Navigators provides residents with guidance over the phone to access available programs and services that can help them manage income disruptions and other financial concerns. Through one-on-one discussions, Financial Navigators will help address personal financial issues, identify immediate steps to manage expenses and maximize income, and make referrals to other services such as bill paying assistance, government services, and food and childcare support. Waco is offering the Financial Navigator services in partnership with Prosper Waco.

Council Member John Kinnaird explained, “We know that our citizens are struggling, and in this environment where stress is high and keeping track of all available resources is difficult at best, being able to provide a comprehensive and helpful resource like Financial Navigators is invaluable.”

Lewisville Debuts New Public Art Piece

The City of Lewisville recently presented the community with the newest addition to its beloved public art program – The Lewisville Boot.

The boot was carved from a large pecan tree that was removed from a city lot during a construction project. In order to pay tribute to the life of this beautiful tree and its history as part of Lewisville, the City commissioned artist Della Meredith to carve it into art. The trunk of the tree has been turned upside down so that a large limb could become the toe of the boot. The carving is decorated with motifs that symbolize Lewisville.

The nearly six-foot tall carving is now on display at the Lewisville Visitor Information Center in historic Old Town Lewisville. The art piece was commissioned as part of the City’s Public Art Master Plan which was adopted in 2018. The master plan has several components: it sets out a vision for the role that public art can play in Lewisville’s future as a successful city; identifies opportunities for incorporating public art in public places and encouraging it as part of new private developments; and outlines policies and administrative procedures that will help it get there.

To see all of the public art pieces in the Lewisville collection, visit https://www.mclgrand.com/the-arts/public-art-program.
SMALL CITIES’ CORNER

INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HONDO

The City of Hondo experienced a lack of participation across all demographics of the community as evident in low participation in elections, public meetings, and city events. To increase participation and engage the community, Hondo launched two civic empowerment programs - Hondo U and the Hondo Youth Advisory Commission (YAC) - in the fall of 2018 to provide education and leadership opportunities to residents of all ages.

Hondo U

The City created Hondo U, an eight-week civic engagement course aimed at educating citizens on how municipal government works. Each week, the course is taught by a city department director, followed by a tour. This provides citizens with hands-on experience in city properties and functions like the police department, public works, finance, and animal care services. Additionally, each course concludes with an opportunity to provide real-time feedback on the program for current and future planning.

Hondo YAC

The Hondo YAC, established in partnership with the Hondo Independent School District (ISD), was created to engage local high school students and give them a voice about decisions being made in their hometown. The YAC is comprised of students nominated by their teachers, but not just those who are normally engaged in campus life. Special emphasis is given to students who may not generally have a voice or those who feel disenfranchised.

The organization has bylaws and is governed by Robert’s Rules of Order. The YAC meets regularly on campus or at the City Council chambers and allows non-member students a place to voice concerns, present projects, and discuss the future of their town with the group.

The Hondo YAC has attended the annual Texas Youth Advisory Commission Summit, sponsored by the Texas Municipal League, twice to brainstorm ideas with other Texas YACs. Additionally, the group has even grown to take on a community service project addressing the City’s homeless pet population. The group gives the City’s future councilmembers, board and commission members, and civic leaders an opportunity to begin learning what leadership and public service truly means.

Keys to Success

The City identified three keys to success for both programs in the initial planning process that included cooperation from outside entities, financings of the programs, and cooperation from within the organization. Hondo was able to successfully partner with Hondo ISD for the YAC. For Hondo U, the Alamo Area Council of Governments provides access to free transportation for tours, local restaurants assist with discounted catering services, and service organizations such as the Rotary Club and Lions Club allow for presentations to promote the event. During the City’s budgeting process, staff recommended and Council authorized $10,000 for both programs. Additionally, two councilmembers were elected to serve as liaisons for Hondo U. These councilmembers attend each class, answer questions, and serve as a tie between the community and city government. Finally, City staff identified this as a way to provide accurate and transparent information to citizens making them the future ambassadors for the City of Hondo.

Outcomes

The outcomes of these programs have been both immediate and long-term. The immediate outcomes from the YAC have included giving students an experience of life outside their small town and empowering those students who were not engaged in other outside activities by giving them a future passion for civic leadership. The long-term impact will be engaged community leaders even if they don’t make Hondo their hometown.

Hondo U has been a success, even to the point that the City has had to limit the amount of participation to maintain the intimate and meaningful experience. Feedback received during the program about processes is being reviewed for implementation to streamline procedures to better serve Hondo citizens. The City has had multiple applications submitted from Hondo U graduates to serve on various boards and commissions.

Overall, Hondo’s approach to intergenerational community engagement provides a holistic way for citizens to get educated, connect, and participate. The long-term outcomes may not be fully realized, but early evidence shows that the programs are cultivating civically-educated citizens who are more engaged and connected to their town.
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**Q & A**

**Q** What is House Bill 2840?

House Bill 2840 by Representative Terry Canales (D – Edinburg) passed during the 86th Regular Legislative Session. It became effective on September 1, 2019. The bill, codified at Texas Government Code Section 551.007, amends the Texas Open Meetings Act (Act) to allow certain public input at open meetings. Before the passage of the bill, the public had a legal right only to observe, rather than provide input on, an open meeting of a governmental body. See Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. JC-0169 (2000).

House Bill 2840 gives the public the right to address the following government bodies on an item on the agenda at an open meeting:

- a city council;
- a deliberative body that has rulemaking or quasi-judicial power and that is classified as a department, agency, or political subdivision of a city (e.g., probably a city’s board of adjustment); and
- the governing body of a special district created by law (Each city should consult local legal counsel as to the applicability of this provision. See, e.g., Sierra Club v. Austin Transp. Study Policy Advisory Committee, 746 S.W.2d 298 (Tex. App. —Austin 1988), concluding that Austin transportation advisory committee was a “special district”).

TEX. GOV’T CODE §§ 551.001(3)(C), (D), (H), 551.007(a). The bill also applies to a handful of other nonmunicipal governmental bodies. See id. §§ 551.001(3), 551.007(a).

Notably, the bill doesn’t apply to state agencies. It also doesn’t appear to apply to entities that are subject to the Act, but don’t fall within the term “governmental body” as defined in the Act, such as a planning and zoning commission or an economic development corporation. See, e.g., TEX. LOC. GOV’T CODE §§ 211.0075, 501.072; see also Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. JC-0327 (2001) (concluding that the board of the Bryan-College State Economic Development Corporation is not a governmental body under the Act). City officials should consult local legal counsel to determine whether any particular entity is subject to the bill.

**Q** Does House Bill 2840 mandate that a governmental body have a “public hearing” on every agenda item?

No. Public hearings are meetings legally required by law to record public comment on a matter being considered by a governmental entity. These same laws govern how the public hearings are to be conducted. See, e.g., TEX. LOC. GOV’T CODE §§ 102.006(a) (“The governing body of a municipality shall hold a public hearing on the proposed budget. Any person may attend and may participate in the hearing.”), 43.063(a) (“Before a municipality may institute annexation proceedings, the governing body of the municipality must conduct two public hearings at which persons interested in the annexation are given the opportunity to be heard.”).

Existing precedent makes clear the distinction between a public hearing and public comment at a meeting. See Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. Nos. M-220 (1968) at 5 (A meeting that is “open to the public” under the Act is one that the public is entitled to attend.); JM-584 (1986) at 3; H-188 (1973) at 2; LO-96-111 at 1; see also Eudaly v. City of Colleyville, 642 S.W.2d 75, 77 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 1982, writ ref’d n.r.e.) (distinguishing between “public meeting,” where public was not entitled to comment, and “public hearing,” where public was entitled to comment).

House Bill 2840 doesn’t require a public hearing on every item on an agenda. It merely grants limited authority to a citizen to address a governmental body, subject to reasonable rules adopted by the body.

**Q** When does the public have the right to address a governmental body on items on the agenda of an open meeting?

Some commentators suggested that the bill allows a citizen to address a governmental body throughout a meeting on agenda items before a vote, not only in the time designated by the city. That’s incorrect. Government Code Section 551.007(b) provides that “A governmental body shall allow each member of the public who desires to address the body regarding an item on an agenda for an open
meeting of the body to address the body regarding the item at the meeting before or during the body's consideration of the item.” TEX. GOV'T CODE § 551.007(b) (emphasis added).

The legislature typically uses the word “or” as a disjunctive. See Spradlin v. Jim Walter Homes, Inc., 34 S.W.3d 578, 581 (Tex. 2000). “It separates words or phrases in the alternate relationship, indicating that either of the separated words or phrases may be employed without the other.” Jones v. State, 175 S.W.3d 927, 932 (Tex. App.—Dallas 2005, no pet.) (citing Perez v. State, 11 S.W.3d 218, 225 (Tex. Crim. App. 2000)). The legislature’s use of the disjunctive here evidences its intent to allow the governmental body to decide at which point in the meeting a member of the public addresses them.

The attorney general has opined that Section 551.007(b) does not grant a member of the public the right to address a governmental body both before and during the governmental body’s consideration of an item. Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. KP-0300 (2020)(“A governmental body may satisfy subsection 551.007(b)’s requirements by holding a single public comment period at the beginning of an open meeting to address all items on the agenda.”) Moreover, a member of the public has no right under Section 551.007(b) to address a governmental body after the body’s consideration of an item. See also TEX. GOV’T CODE § 551.007(c) (authorizing the governmental body to adopt “rules concerning the public’s right to speak at an open meeting”), TEX. LOC. GOV’T CODE § 22.038(c) (“The governing body shall determine the rules of its proceedings”), Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. DM-473 (1998) (concluding a home rule city is authorized to adopt reasonable rules of procedure for meetings).

The legislative history of House Bill 2840 explains why a governmental body may limit a member of the public to one of the two options: “It has been suggested that the practice of the governing bodies of certain political subdivisions to provide for public input and comment only at the conclusion of a meeting of the governing body makes it too difficult for the public to properly weigh in on decisions being made because they are forced to wait through the entire meeting to provide an opinion on any subject matter being addressed at the meeting.” See Senate Business & Commerce Comm., Bill Analysis, H.B. 2840, Senate Research Center, May 15, 2019.

**Q** Is a governmental body allowed to adopt reasonable rules regarding the public’s right to address them at open meetings?

**A** Yes. A governmental body may adopt reasonable rules concerning the public’s right to address the body at an open meeting, consistent with the relevant provisions of law allowing it to do so. Id. § 551.007(c); See Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. Nos. KP-300 (2020), H-188 (1973) at 2. LO-96-111 at 1. The rules may include, among many other things, the length of comments on a given item. Id. § 551.007(d) (If the person addressing the governmental body needs a translator, the governmental body is required to allow at least twice the normal amount of time for the non-English speaker to address the body.).

Prior to the passage of House Bill 2840, the attorney general summarized the authority of a local governmental body to control public comment at its meetings:

We think that the governmental body has broad discretion in exercising its statutory powers under the Local Government Code, and may limit the number of persons who may speak on a topic and the length and frequency of their presentations. However, it must act reasonably and may not discriminate on the basis of the particular views expressed, nor arbitrarily deny citizens their right to apply to the government for redress of grievances by “petition, address or remonstrance,” as guaranteed by article I, section 27 of the Texas Constitution. The governmental body as a whole has the authority to determine its own agenda. Attorney General Opinions DM-228 (1993) at 2-3, JM-63 (1983) at 1. The body may adopt reasonable rules consistent with relevant provisions of law – including, among other things, the Open Meetings Act – to govern the conduct of its meetings. Attorney General Opinion DM-228 (1993) at 3. The court may limit the number, frequency, and length of presentations to it. Attorney General Opinion H-188 (1973) at 2. We note that, as Attorney General Opinion H-188 points out, the Open Meetings Act does not of itself give citizens the right to participate in a public meeting, but only the right to observe it. However, if the body has adopted a policy of opening the floor to citizen comment, Attorney General Opinion H-188 counsels that such a policy must be administered in an even-handed fashion, and that the body may not discriminate against a particular point of view. Such limits as the governmental-
tal body] adopts must not be arbitrary or unreasonable, and must not unfairly discriminate among views seeking expression.

Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. LO-96-111. Of course, House Bill 2840 modifies the conclusion that the Act doesn’t give members of the public the right to address a governmental body at an open meeting. Beyond that, however, the remaining conclusions remain valid. See also TEX. LOC. GOV’T CODE § 22.038(c) (“The governing body [of a general law city] shall determine the rules of its proceedings”), Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. KP-300 (2020), DM-473 (1998) (concluding a home rule city is authorized to adopt reasonable rules of procedure as long as they are not inconsistent with the constitution, statutes or city charter provisions).

The bottom line is that a member of the public’s right to address a governmental body under Section 511.007 is, by the express terms of the section, subject to reasonable rules adopted by the governmental body. Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. KP-300 (2020) (“Pursuant to Subsection 551.007(c), a governmental body may adopt a rule capping the total amount of time a member of the public has to address all items on the agenda if the rule is reasonable.”)

Q Does House Bill 2840 require a governmental body to allow a member of the public to address them during the body’s consideration of an agenda item if the person wishes to do so?

A No. The city council could comply with Section 551.007 by allowing a member of the public to address the body regarding the item any time before the body’s consideration of the item. What if a member of the public misses the opportunity to address a governmental body on an item during a designated public comment period at the beginning of an open meeting? Is a governmental body then required to allow that person to address them on the item later in the meeting during the body’s consideration of the item? No, because the governmental body retains control of its meetings. Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. KP-300 (2020) (“A governmental body may satisfy subsection 551.007(c)’s requirements by holding a single public comment period at the beginning of an open meeting to address all items on the agenda.”). The governmental body may set a designated time (e.g., before agenda items are considered) for members of the public to address the body regarding an item on the agenda. If a member of the public misses that opportunity, Section 551.007 does not grant the person the right to interrupt the meeting.

What if a member of the public is in attendance during a designated public comment period at the beginning of an open meeting, but chooses not to comment on an agenda item until later in the meeting during the body’s consideration of the item? Is the governmental body required to allow that person to comment on the item during the body’s consideration of the item? No, because the governmental body retains control of its meetings.

Q Is a governmental body required to allow the public to address them on agenda items at “workshops” or “work sessions?”

A Cities sometimes post meeting notices indicating that the city council will hold a “council work session” or “council workshop.” These terms are not defined in the Act, but are commonly used to refer to a meeting in which the council will be briefed by staff (or other experts) on a single matter of interest to the city. Oftentimes, the subject of a work session is highly technical in nature and/or requires a detailed and thorough explanation. A city council generally will not plan to take action during a work session as it is frequently intended as an educational precursor to some possible future action. For instance, city councils often hold meetings referred to as “work sessions” leading up to the adoption of the budget.

City attorneys disagree about whether Section 551.007 applies to a workshop or work sessions. While some believe it applies, others have a different interpretation. That interpretation is largely based on when the governmental body “considers” an item. For example, a city may hold budget workshops for city councilmembers to discuss financial priorities amongst themselves. Some argue that the city council isn’t “considering” the item at that time. Rather, they argue, the budget itself will be considered when it is placed on the city council’s agenda for action at a future meeting. The bill author’s staff has indicated that the bill isn’t meant to apply to a workshop or work session.
May the governmental body still allow the public to ask questions about items not on the agenda? Must a governmental body allow the public to address them about items not on the agenda?

It has long been “common for units of local government to invite any member of the public to make whatever comments they desire in the public forum at the time of the public meeting,” including comments about items not on the agenda. Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. Nos. JC-0169 (2000). A governmental body may, but does not have to, allow the public to make comments about items not on the agenda. House Bill 2840 mandates that a governmental body allow a citizen to speak only in regard to items on an agenda.

If the governmental body allows the public to comment on items not on the agenda, the governmental body can still apply reasonable rules regarding the number, frequency, and length of presentation, but it cannot discriminate against speakers. See, e.g., Tex. Att’y Gen. Op. No. LO-96-111. The governmental body may not deliberate on any item that is not on the agenda. For such an item, the governmental body may: (1) make a statement of fact regarding the item; (2) make a statement concerning the policy regarding the item; or (3) propose that the item be placed on a future agenda. TEX. GOV’T CODE § 551.042.

How has COVID-19 impacted House Bill 2840?

In March 2020, Governor Abbott temporarily suspended various parts of the Open Meetings Act in response to the COVID-19 disaster. See https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/open-meetings-act-update. As of this writing, the suspensions are still in place.

One part of the Act that is suspended is the requirement in Texas Government Code Section 551.007(b) that a governmental body allow each member of the public who desires to address the body regarding an item on an agenda to address the body before or during the body’s consideration of the item. The suspension order does, however, require that a governmental body “offer alternative methods of communicating” with public officials. The suspension order does not impact a governmental body’s ability to have reasonable rules regarding the public’s right to address the body.

A quick online search reveals myriad ways that governmental bodies allow for public interaction and comment during a remote meeting held under the governor’s suspension order. For instance, some cities engage in the following practices:

- Provide a dedicated voicemail or email where the public may submit comments. These comments may be read or played aloud at the meeting, or simply provided to the city council for review prior to the meeting.
- Allow the public to address the city council by phone during the meeting. This is typically achieved by requiring an individual to provide a contact phone number prior to the meeting that can be used by the presiding officer to call the individual.
- Utilize videoconference software that offers a “moderator” function, giving the presiding officer the ability to unmute a registered speaker to deliver live comments.

The variety of methods used by cities to interact with the public during remote meetings is likely a function of both the assortment of technologies used to hold meetings and differing legal interpretations of the suspension order.

Each city should consult its own legal counsel in making a final decision about how best to address this issue.
Two of the most important characteristics of an All-America City are equity and inclusion, qualities that are embodied in one of this year’s winners, El Paso. The 2020 All-America Cities were announced in late August, and El Paso became one of this year’s 10 designated communities by showing that it is engaging residents to improve health and well-being, with a strong dose of equity and inclusion.

While racial equity is in the headlines this year, some communities have been working to improve racial equity for years. Equity, to be clear, is not the same as equality, though equality can often be an outcome. Equity means that every community member has what they need to thrive. Importantly, equity cannot be defined by professionals, but rather depends on input from those served, because only they can define their particular needs and interests.

This is why inclusion is important. By engaging all parts of a community in decision-making, a community can better design services to work for everyone. And since so many outcomes, like health and safety, depend on resident engagement, inclusive civic engagement is key to civic success.

The City of El Paso has a long-standing history of healthy working relationships with community-based organizations, businesses, and civic organizations within the city, as well as work to engage
residents from all segments of the community to develop solutions to problems. This was shown in the three projects highlighted in their All-America Cities application.

In 2019, El Paso experienced a record number of asylum seekers and refugees from Central and South America. El Pasoans united to volunteer at local shelters operated by various organizations, such as the Catholic Diocese of El Paso and Annunciation House, to provide food, shelter and other services to migrants, immigrants, and refugees.

The second project presented by El Paso at the All-America City awards was its work to increase mental health services and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. The lead organization in this effort is the Paso del Norte Health Foundation, which launched a community-level intervention, funding organizations to implement evidence-based programs such as Mental Health First Aid and around-the-clock availability of services.

Finally, the City showcased the work of its animal shelter to collaborate with the community to minimize euthanizations by improving the health of pets in the community, reducing the number of pets brought to the shelter, and expanding spay/neuter programs.

These three projects demonstrate El Paso’s approach to equity and inclusion, which are two of the seven qualities of an All-America City. Other qualities are authentic communication, shared vision and values, a culture of engagement, community leadership, and collaborative institutions. Together these components create civic capital, which is the capacity of a community to solve problems and thrive.

Congratulations to El Paso and the other All-America Cities that are leading the way by engaging their whole community to create equitable, thriving communities. And a special shout-out to the City of Harlingen, which was a finalist this year, and to the many other Texas communities that have won the award in past years.

Join us! The application for All-America Cities in 2021 is now available on our website, www.ncl.org. One by one, communities across the country are working together to build a better America for all. ★
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT TEXAS

By Steven Pedigo, Professor of Practice, Director of the LBJ Urban Lab
Kirk Watson, Founding Dean, Hobby School of Public Affairs, University of Houston
For a long time, Texas’ aggressively pro-business climate made it an ideal place for business investment and Texas reaped its fair share of rewards. Powered by the oil boom, technology, and life science, our economy topped more than $1.7 trillion last year, making it the tenth largest in the world. As recently as December 2019, our statewide unemployment rate was at an all-time low of 3.4 percent. We had problems, of course, but most policymakers assumed that we could grow our way out of them. That complacency—and, at times, a willingness to put politics before pragmatism, refusing federal largesse as a matter of supposed principle—was a privilege of affluence.

But then came the COVID-19 pandemic and with it our forced economic timeout. As more than 1.6 million Texans lined up for unemployment, a blinding light was shone on our state’s geographic, economic, and social systems, revealing their longstanding inequities and vulnerabilities. As business activity resumes across the state, we can no longer kick those problems under the rug, debating or denying their existence. It’s time to write a new playbook for our new normal, one that acknowledges our state’s economic soft spots and addresses them, redefining Texas as a place that is more resilient and less unequal.

For too long, the word “resilience” has been used solely in the context of environmental disasters, as in a community’s capacity to handle a flood, earthquake, windstorm, wildfire, or drought—or an unnatural catastrophe, like terrorism or a toxic spill. We want to challenge Texans to think about resiliency more expansively, as a place’s capacity to weather threats to its economy and its residents’ health, and even more broadly, “as the capacity of residents, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems to survive, adapt, and grow,” no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience. The more resiliency a community has, the less likely it is to break under pressure—and the faster it is to rebound.

Achieving a more resilient and equitable future won’t be easy, but there are strategies and actions that we can adopt now that will get us there. Some of these new “plays” are:

- **Expand cooperation among local governments and between state and local efforts**, including authorizing local governments to make decisions suited to their community’s needs. Top-down, one-size-fits-all model don’t work. Collaboration, not competition, between local and state government is essential if Texas is to achieve a lasting resiliency. Texas’s state-level lawmakers need to understand that they cannot support all of their constituents if they refuse to work with cities, and local leaders need to forge partnerships with their statewide counterparts.

- **Build a business climate that supports small and local businesses as well as big multinationals**, while requiring that incentives to attract new companies to the state achieve the goal of job creation. Let’s hold companies accountable for Texas’s public investments in them, ensuring better jobs and more training for Texans.

- **Ensure that every worker in Texas has access to quality childcare options**. Without a doubt, the lack of affordable childcare poses the biggest obstacle to more inclusive economic development in our state. Workers with children from every sector of the economy – knowledge, production, and especially, service – need childcare that they can trust and afford.

- **Increase Texas’s investment in healthcare, including rural healthcare and public health**. More than five million Texans are uninsured; the pandemic has underlined the importance of public health infrastructure. Beyond that,
health care institutions are huge creators of middle class jobs. We need to think of public wellness as a vital form of economic development and then act accordingly. We can start by accepting the federal dollars (i.e. the Medicaid expansion) that Texas has so far rejected for reasons that are arguably purely partisan.

- **Lead the future of energy** by supporting alternative energy research and adopting statewide goals for energy efficiency. Texas is already the largest producer of wind energy in the country and the eighth largest in the world, and solar energy accounts for more than 10,000 jobs across the state. There are a host of excellent reasons to seize the benefits—both economic and environmental—of being the world’s leader in alternative and renewable energy. Texas’ interest in green energy goes beyond its energy sector. The sprawling building patterns of our cities and suburbs are more carbon-intensive and vulnerable to natural disasters than they should be. Denser development, greater mass transit capacity, and less reliance on cars can all help Texas become more resilient and sustainable.

- **Protect essential service workers** by ensuring access to healthcare and family-supporting wages. Texas needs to honor these heroes’ self-sacrifice and service. Our business community must rethink its relationships with them, recognizing the extent to which they depend upon them and the reciprocities they deserve. Not all of the burdens should be borne by companies; the state can help with incentives and direct subsidies. For example, the crisis has revealed how important paid sick leave is. Going forward, perhaps it should be treated as a part of infrastructure—an infrastructure of well-being—and supported by tax dollars, much as roads are.

- **Develop Texas’ rural communities as centers for entrepreneurship** through state investment and increased regional cooperation. Texas’ rural communities are too small individually to make effective economic development investments on their own. Tourism, hospitality, and specialty retail (like local arts, crafts, and foods) have helped to revive a few fortunately situated rural communities that have beautiful scenery and unique cultures. But depending too much on one sector leaves economies vulnerable to downturns and disasters, and the coronavirus has brought both in spades. For sustainable job growth, rural communities must pool their resources to develop robust regional export sectors.

- **Invest in workforce development**, improving the alignment between regional workplace needs and available training. Twenty-first century economic development is not about cheap labor—it’s about skilled talent. This requires investments in training. Public and private sector actors should be partnering to provide quick-to-market adaptive training—a necessary requirement for a resilient future.

- **Leverage Texas universities as accelerators for talent and thought leadership**. Texas’ major universities are already hubs of innovation and growth, but beyond their scholarship, teaching, and R&D missions, they have the ability to play much greater roles in community and economic development. Working in their broadest capacity as anchors, Texas universities can exploit the power of local purchasing and procurement, accelerate cluster development, improve workforce readiness, and serve as laboratories for the development of practical solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

- **Boost physical and digital infrastructure** ensuring that all Texans have access to broadband. It’s time to end the contest between roads and rail/transit, while closing the accessibility gap for online learning, telehealth, and remote work. As expensive as they are, infrastructure projects, both physical and digital, can help to jumpstart the recovery by putting people to work, while laying the groundwork for a Texas that is not only more sustainable, but that has a higher ceiling for growth.

As important and urgent as it is to get Texas up and running, our ultimate challenge is to make our state stronger, more resilient, and more equitable than it has been in the past. COVID-19 has exposed both our weaknesses and a better way. Building resiliency won’t be easy and it won’t be cheap. We can’t cut our way to a sustainable prosperity; we will have to go all in on our investments. The time to start building a better Texas and creating opportunity for all is now. Let’s seize this opportunity.

Steven Pedigo is a professor of practice at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. He directs the School’s Urban Lab.

Kirk Watson is the founding dean of the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston. First elected to the Texas Senate in 2006, Watson represented the Austin area for 13 years.
Thankful
for the many ways
cities serve their communities
HOUSTON PAYS IT FORWARD WITH RELIEF RESPONSE
After Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, people around the nation helped Houston in its recovery efforts. Houstonians haven’t forgotten that generosity and are paying it forward by helping their neighbors in East Texas and Louisiana who are rebuilding in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura.

After learning of the devastation caused by Laura, Mayor Turner formed the Houston Paying It Forward support drive in partnership with the Mayor’s Health Equity Response Task Force, Kroger President Joe Kelly, Gallery Furniture owner Jim McIngvale, A-Rocket Moving and Storage, and the Relief Gang.

All donated items were sent to the City’s neighbors in Port Arthur, Orange, and Beaumont, as well as in Sulphur and Lake Charles, Louisiana. The supplies were distributed to residents trying to recover after their homes and personal belongings were damaged or destroyed.

The relief effort accepted donations in person and online from September 1-10. Requested supplies included diapers, cleaning supplies, nonperishable food, bottled water, and pet food. COVID-19 protocols necessitated that all donated items were new or unused and unopened. Drop off locations included the George R. Brown Convention Center, Gallery Furniture, and area Kroger Stores.

"After Hurricane Harvey displaced many of our family and friends in 2017, people from other cities and states helped Houston recover by donating their time, money and supplies," Turner said. “We are being called to action for our neighbors who were in the path of Hurricane Laura and are now experiencing great suffering and loss. We cannot sit idly by while they are in need."

Volunteers spent two weeks collecting, sorting and boxing the critically needed supplies to help storm survivors recover. Two 18-wheelers provided by A-Rocket Moving and Storage transported the donated goods to Orange, Texas on September 5 where the items were handed out to hundreds of people.

The trucks packed with supplies for Louisiana left Houston on September 11 and were greeted by Lake Charles Mayor Nic Hunter.

“I am proud that Houstonians have opened their hearts and wallets to help our neighbors recover from Hurricane Laura," added Turner. “We will continue to pay forward the volunteerism and generosity with every chance we get." ★
Citizens are engaged when they have a meaningful role in the decision-making and implementation of programs and projects that affect them. Yet often, residents know very little about their local government's operations and plans. This paradox creates challenges for city leaders who want community buy-in, especially when addressing complex issues such as capital project funding or rezoning decisions.

Articles in the local papers, email blasts, and direct mail can help citizens pay attention to local issues. But they're much like interested bystanders – disconnected, watching from the sidelines, and not sharing their opinions or getting involved.

City leaders throughout Texas are seeking and trying out new ways of connecting with residents. From citizen academies to participatory budgeting to neighborhood engagement, these programs are inspiring a healthy partnership with citizens that gives them a better understanding of local government and encourages their participation.

The City of Horseshoe Bay, incorporated in 2005, is a small community with a population under 8,000. Its motto “People Helping People” inspires city leaders, staff, and the community to make Horseshoe Bay the home they want it to be. Yet communication can be a challenge because a large number of the City’s residents travel, are second home owners, and don’t engage with social media.

In 2016, Horseshoe Bay City Manager Stan R. Farmer developed the City’s first citizens’ academy to help improve communication and community connections. The program is now named the Dottie Anderson Citizens’ Academy in remembrance of long-time resident Dottie Anderson who was a spring 2019 graduate.

Each Citizens’ Academy consists of nine weekly classes held on Thursday afternoons. Classes are run by the city manager or a department head, and cover a range of topics including fire, police, utilities, finance, code enforcement, development services, and municipal court. The final class includes a graduation ceremony where students receive a certificate of completion signed by the mayor and an Academy shirt embroidered with the City’s logo. A group photo is taken with the mayor, and sent to local media outlets.

Attendance at the Citizens’ Academy is limited to 15 residents. Applicants must reside in the City of Horseshoe Bay with preference given to full-time residents. A key objective in the selection process is to include people from different backgrounds and neighborhoods so they work together and discover how much they have in common.

“Our Citizens’ Academy has proven invaluable in educating almost 100 Citizen Ambassadors since its inception in 2016,” said Farmer. “Every student has been excited to learn about the City and our departments. They made relationships with staff and became familiar with the effort and care it takes to run a city.”

“In addition, these graduates have gone on to serve on City advisory committees and even have been elected to council. It has become a recruitment tool for the next set of leaders who already possess much knowledge of how their City operates,” Farmer added.

In addition to its Citizens’ Academy, Horseshoe Bay has an active Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) that is integrated into the City’s Emergency Operations Plan and has become a deployable asset in emergencies. The Horseshoe
Bay Fire Department hosts the CERT training program, a nationally supported, locally implemented initiative that teaches citizens how to better prepare for emergencies.

The City’s CERT program also trains and organizes a team of volunteers to assist their families, neighbors, co-workers, community members, and first responders during emergencies by teaching basic disaster response skills such as:

- CERT organization and deployment
- Disaster medical operations
- Fire safety
- Light search and rescue
- Basic first aid

The ability for CERT volunteers to perform these activities provides valuable capabilities during emergencies by freeing up professional responders so they can focus on life-saving activities. The CERT team supports tasks that include rapid damage assessment from a severe weather event, assisting with emergency shelter operations, and supporting light search and rescue missions.

Horseshoe Bay’s CERT course is held once weekly for four weeks. At the end of the training, CERT members participate in a mock disaster simulation followed by a graduation ceremony.

The class size is limited to 20. Graduates of the Horseshoe Bay Citizens’ Academy were the first group to be offered the training.

“The development of engagement projects such as the Citizens Academy, CERT, and our varied committees on special interest areas has served to engage citizens in city activities and create knowledgeable ambassador neighbors throughout the community,” said Mayor Cynthia Clinesmith, PhD. “The Citizens Academy graduates, in particular, serve as informal ‘clarifiers’ when questions arise in social settings, among neighbors, on the golf course, or at church. In this way, we’ve been able to get accurate understandings out, and we have advocates who let us know early if there are emerging issues so that we can stay ahead through proactive communication.”

These and other community engagement programs in Horseshoe Bay help residents understand local issues, encourage open discussion of concerns, stimulate new ideas, involve people from different neighborhoods, and increase trust.

“The level of trust in city operations and fiscal management has been deepened, and this is creating an attitude of collaboration toward improved quality of life overall,” explained Clinesmith. People helping people. It’s the Texas way. ★

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**2017 IPSOS Survey of HomeServe policyholders and non-policyholders
MAKE ONLINE ENGAGEMENT WORK FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

By Daniel McGinn, AICP, Director of Planning and Environmental Services, City of Corpus Christi
Clyde Melick, AICP, Assistant City Manager, City of Midlothian
Wendy Shabay, FAICP, Assoc. AIA, Urban Planning and Design Group Manager, Freese and Nichols
Chance Sparks, AICP, CNU-A, Urban Planner, Freese and Nichols

When communities went into coronavirus lockdowns and canceled public meetings starting in March 2020, some cities were determined not to let the disruption stall their planning momentum. Communities as different as Corpus Christi (population 327,000) on the Gulf Coast and Midlothian (population 34,000) south of Dallas-Fort Worth turned more heavily than ever to digital town halls, online surveys, social media, and other mechanisms to drive their public engagement.

Our experiences underscore how the future of public engagement has been reshaped not temporarily but for good. While in-person elements will regain a foothold, online tools almost certainly will continue to play a predominant role. This year has taught us much about maximizing the benefits of technology — and where we need to close gaps.

Abruptly switching to an all-online format required city staffs to rapidly adapt. Even though unexpected forces drove the change, this expanded reliance on technology demonstrated how online tools can help gather strong, responsive public input to guide leaders in shaping and executing community improvements.

Heading into 2020, online outreach was part of the best practice toolbox for reaching residents at their convenience. But many cities preferred to bring people together at city hall and other locations during the planning process. The breakdown was roughly 80 percent in-person through events such as presentations, workshops and charrettes, and 20 percent through digital means, including interactive surveys, email feedback and online messaging. But with people required to stay home and public buildings closed, everything had to go online to move forward.

Here are some ways that our experiences can help other communities:

Midlothian’s Downtown Master Plan

The Challenge

A rapidly growing bedroom community of 34,000, Midlothian was well into developing a downtown master plan when public gatherings had to be halted. The City already was engaged in finding creative ways to boost public participation, including digital outreach and significant leveraging of social media. It’s challenging to get busy young families with other commitments and workers with long daily commutes to attend evening meetings. And it was important to persuade residents to consider new, vibrant alternatives to a 9-to-5 downtown.
Working with Freese and Nichols planners, the City adopted digital tools that offered a way to draw in more residents and gather a wider variety of feedback. People could take an online survey at their convenience, and they could express opinions on multiple aspects, such as housing, traffic, congestion, amenities and city services.

The Results

The response proved to be tremendously valuable:
1,126 Participants
31,922 Data Points Gathered
1,329 Free-response Comments

More than 500 responses were received in the first 48 hours that the survey was available. The results also debunked some myths regarding digital outreach, such as whether older populations would participate at levels similar to in-person outreach. Ultimately, the plan reflected the vision that residents described through their input. The City Council approved the downtown master plan unanimously in June, confident in residents’ support.

Corpus Christi’s Area Development Plans

The Challenge

Since 2017, Corpus Christi has been updating its Area Development Plans across nine city sectors. Freese and Nichols assisted with five of them — Southside, London, Westside, Flour Bluff, and Padre/Mustang Island — gathering community input through online surveys along with community meetings, focus groups and advisory committees. Online surveys served valuable purposes at two critical junctures: at the beginning of each project, providing insight into the study area, and at the end, helping develop community consensus about recommendations in the plans.

By March of 2020, two of the five plans were complete, one was underway, and two more were set to begin. Online surveys and in-person public meetings for the Flour Bluff and Padre/Mustang Island plans were scheduled for mid-March — when the pandemic upended activities. Instead of being canceled, community and advisory committee meetings were moved online. The planning team used social media channels and direct email to encourage participation in detailed online surveys specific to each area. The online surveys yielded valuable input from the community that in normal times would have come through conventional in-person meetings. This allowed the team to continue developing the plans and keep the projects on schedule.

Although part of the same planning effort, the five plans are separate projects reaching different populations with different needs — and tailoring each survey to the individual area revealed the priorities of each community.

The Results

Totals across all five surveys:
2,168 Participants
44,085 Data Points Gathered
2,941 Free-response Comments

Completed in January/February:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Southside</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Westside</th>
</tr>
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<td>325</td>
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<td>4,314</td>
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<td>Free-response Comments</td>
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Surveyed post-February:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Flour Bluff</th>
<th>Padre/Mustang Island</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Free-response Comments</td>
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</table>
Tips for Effective Online Public Engagement

Employ a range of digital tools

- Explore the options for services that enable you to effectively host engagement for large audiences as well as smaller stakeholder groups, and various intuitive and interactive tools built into the platforms.

- Consider apps that allow you to collect feedback through polls and collaborate using whiteboards during meetings.

- Develop participation plans that provide alternatives to any in-person engagement; for every in-person engagement approach, there is a corresponding digital/social-distanced alternative with similar effectiveness.

- Consider the “digital divide” in your community and develop approaches to bridge the gap with these often-marginalized populations. While digital is trendy, older analog approaches can be critical to inclusive, equitable engagement.

Create an informational, easy-to-navigate survey

- Design your survey to collect the kinds of data that elected officials need for decision making; think about how the data can be used beyond the project.

- Ask people about things they care about and provide familiar examples to consider.

- Use compelling visuals that reflect your community.

- Include straightforward, familiar response mechanisms, such as star ratings and interactive maps that show landmarks and allow participants to drop pins.

- Have open-ended questions to capture the widest range of responses.

Be creative about spreading the word

- Share information on your city’s existing, well-followed social media tools (such as Facebook and Twitter), rather than setting up project-specific accounts.

- Determine where your residents are gathering to exchange information, such as church and neighborhood groups, and enlist those networks to share alerts about meetings and surveys.

- Have community leaders and influencers — unelected and elected — share information with their followers and friends.

- Use imagery — images and videos have much higher viewership rates on social media compared to regular posts.

- Send direct emails to residents who have signed up for alerts or city newsletters.

Mine your data to achieve best results

- Examine early feedback to determine which populations are missing and might require contact through mailed surveys or phone calls.

- Analyze open-ended survey responses for trends and patterns to help inform planning.

- Conduct a follow-up survey later in the process to verify that the plan reflects what the community wanted.

- Geography matters — designing surveys that involve tools like pin drops on an interactive map allows you to better understand comments and link to location.

Conclusion

Our experience shows that acute challenges can prompt communities to think more clearly about their future and their collective vision. Cities should be bold in continuing their planning efforts and engaging their communities, even during difficult times.

Throughout history, pandemics have influenced how cities plan and develop. This one has revealed the importance of access to services, neighborhood equity and inclusion, and quality open spaces. It also has underscored technology’s essential role in improving community responsiveness and communication. Cities that take the time to assess and plan are better poised for resiliency — and to bounce back from challenges, whether caused by a severe public health crisis, an economic recession, or a natural disaster.

To learn more, visit:

“This quality in buildings and in towns cannot be made, but only generated, indirectly, by the ordinary actions of the people, just as a flower cannot be made, but only generated from the seed.” Christopher Alexander, The Timeless Way of Building

In 2020, resiliency has become a common term for many aspects of life, including the need to strengthen our community plans and ordinances. As Texas grapples with the effects of a global pandemic, there has never been a better time for our cities to invest in infrastructure that interweaves nature and our surrounding environment. Residents, timeless, need green spaces, parks, walkable sidewalks, high quality public spaces, and the scenic drives and roads that connect us all.

The Scenic City Certification Program is an answer to the need for integrated planning. This program helps communities become more resilient to rapid growth and urbanization. Scenic Texas and 18 other partners created this program as a diagnostic tool for cities that want to strengthen infrastructure ordinances and celebrate scenic standards through program-level achievement.

The Scenic Cities program recognizes those cities that implement and reinforce high-quality scenic standards. Currently, 85 cities in Texas have committed to strong scenic standards that reflect civic pride and community character. They are well-positioned for economic growth through intentional visual environment planning. The program application process addresses resiliency through 12 scored sections that help ensure authentic placemaking, a rare crossroads between public policy and scenic standards. Ultimately, the program draws a direct correlation between the success of a city’s economic development efforts and the visual appearance of its public spaces.

When communities have local control of their ordinances and codes, they can guide the intentional growth and development that reinforces the collective visual environment. These lasting standards become the fabric of a resilient community that understands scenic beauty in a way that provides high quality of life for residents, an economic development tool for tourism and attracting business, and the delicate balance of population growth and preserved placemaking.

Here is how four Scenic Cities have made themselves more resilient in placemaking and economic development through high visual standards.

SCENIC CITIES: PLANNING FOR RESILIENCY

By Sarah Tober
Executive Director
Scenic Texas
Cedar Hill - Gold

Having first earned its Gold certification in 2011, the City of Cedar Hill has continued to renew with the Scenic City Certification Program as a leader in scenic beauty. The City places a high emphasis on parks and greenspaces, managing and maintaining 32 park properties, including 6 community parks, 17 neighborhood parks, one special purpose park, 3 nature preserves and 4 greenbelts. Additionally, Cedar Hill has established standards that highlight the City’s historic district.

In the lighting standards for streetscapes and public spaces section, Cedar Hill excelled in providing an outdoor lighting program that decreased light pollution effects and preserved the nighttime visual environment. The City also achieved excellent lighting standards by minimizing glare and obtrusive light and emphasizing directional lighting, limiting misdirected, excessive, or unnecessary outdoor lighting, and curtailing and reversing any degradation of the night sky.

Georgetown - Platinum

This central Texas city exudes urban style and southern charm. The City of Georgetown has a strong public arts program and touts the “most beautiful town square in Texas.” The City first earned its Gold certification in 2010 and has leveled up this year to Platinum.

The parks, trails, and open spaces is a section that Georgetown has superiorly planned for, making it incredibly resilient during a time when residents need that green space for physical and mental health. By providing a comprehensive system of parks, greenbelts, and open space that is compatible with the environment and conducive to residential neighborhoods, Georgetown met the national standards of 10 acres per 1,000 population. Additionally, the city has parks that contain a significant number of amenities including trees, benches, and playgrounds maintained to good condition and have security features such as anti-theft devices and safety for parking areas and trails.
Granbury - Silver

Granbury’s motto – “Where Texas History Lives” – can be seen in its commitment to the preservation of its historic landmarks. The City of Granbury has two historic overlay districts and a Historic Preservation Commission. In addition, Granbury’s landscaping ordinance requires tree preservation and plantings in all parking lots. Granbury first earned its Silver certification in 2010 and is recertifying this year.

In the litter and graffiti section, Granbury demonstrated visual environment leadership by expressly prohibiting and fining graffiti and littering, including pedestrian trash as well as trash thrown from motor vehicles. A program exists to enforce effective removal of graffiti. Additionally, public trash receptacles are available and have protective coverings to prevent trash from blowing out of the can.

Baytown - Bronze

The City of Baytown’s proximity to the Trinity Bay already makes this city a desirable location for an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys kayaking, birding, or fishing. Baytown has demonstrated a commitment to interweaving nature and the built environment with a lively town square that includes a farmers’ market and a Nurture Nature festival. The City also features one of the largest stay-cable bridges in the world. Newly certified into the program, Baytown joins an exceptional class of cities that provides a visual environment for generations to enjoy.

In the streetscape enhancement section that includes trees, landscaping, and sidewalks, Baytown ensured that sidewalks were at a minimum of five feet in width, eight feet in transit corridors, and 10 feet in downtown and high-density areas. The City of Baytown ensures that sidewalks are maintained in good condition and have pedestrian buffers with a minimum width of two feet. This kind of planning and commitment to pedestrian walkways and community connectivity is exemplary in the Scenic City Certification Program and deemed necessary for residential quality of life and economic benefit.

About Scenic Texas

Scenic Texas, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of our state’s visual environment, particularly as seen by the traveling public. We are the only state nonprofit that helps citizens safeguard the scenic qualities of Texas roadways, countryside, and communities. We believe in a Texas with exemplary visual standards alongside roadways and enhanced streetscapes that provide better quality of life for citizens and visitors.
CEDAR PARK’S BELL BOULEVARD REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT
A ROADMAP TO A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

By Katherine Caffrey, Assistant City Manager, City of Cedar Park
Rob Shands, Master Developer, Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Project

Bell in a Nutshell
In 2014, the City of Cedar Park embarked on the journey to redevelop and reinvigorate its oldest commercial corridor, Bell Boulevard. Along the way, it has evolved into an auspicious public-private partnership (P3), projected to generate dividends for the City of Cedar Park’s investment, but not before the City did some “heavy lifting” that included:

• Creating a Master Plan that reflected a shared community vision, by engaging thousands of community members
• Working with the Texas Department of Transportation to allow the City to move a portion of a state-owned highway – a local voter-approved bond project
• Creatively leveraging sales tax dollars to help open a large swath of land, piecing together 40 acres from over a dozen different landowners without the use of eminent domain

These renderings show how the Bell District look and feel. At full build-out, the 40-acre Bell District is anticipated to include approximately 16 acres of greenspace, the City’s new library, a park and social hub, restaurants, multiple blocks of high-density residential, some with ground-floor retail, professional office space and individually-owned urban brownstones. (Courtesy of RedLeaf)
Background

It’s no secret that Cedar Park, like other cities across the Austin metro region, has experienced a population and economic boom over the past couple of decades. In Cedar Park, the completion of the toll road opened up the Whitestone Boulevard (RM 1431) corridor, to become Cedar Park’s major social, shopping and dining destination in recent years.

However, another area in the oldest part of the City, once known as the “heart of Cedar Park,” had not experienced the same level of economic growth. Bell Boulevard (US 183), the primary north-south corridor for Cedar Park between Buttercup Creek Boulevard and Park Street, was once the vital community hub. It had become an area that people drive through, not to, which is reflected in this being the only area of town with declining sales tax revenues and somewhat static property values. It looked the same as it did in the 1970s: run down and no cohesion with a picket-effect of countless pole signs. It lacked growth, energy, or any market-driven development.

Community members didn’t need data to tell them Bell needed focused attention. During Cedar Park’s most recent comprehensive planning process, the City consistently heard concerns about Bell from community members. As a result, the City began the process for creating the Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Master Plan. The plan was guided by a task force that included members of City Council, engaged business owners and landowners, the Chamber of Commerce, community leaders, and board members. Thousands who attended community engagement meetings told the City they want this area turned around.

They understood that previous efforts to improve Bell had done little to move the needle. That’s because these efforts focused solely on beautification, or ran the entirety of the road through Cedar Park. Through the planning process, the realization came that Cedar Park needed something bigger than beautification in order to reverse the economic trends emerging along the Bell corridor. Much bigger.

Moving Mountains to Move a Road

Before any plans could advance, Cedar Park needed to find a way to move a State highway – or at least a portion of it. Relocating part of the highway would allow the City to make important highway safety and mobility improvements, and open land for redevelopment of what community members expressed they wanted from the Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Master Plan: the area revitalized as a destination – a special place, unique to Cedar Park. It would serve as a catalyst to the rest of the area.

It turns out that, while challenging, it is possible to move a state-owned highway. City leaders and staff worked closely with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to allow Cedar Park to move a portion of the highway if the City paid for the construction of the new section of roadway. In 2015, voters approved $63 million in General Obligation Bonds for Road Projects that could include the Bell Boulevard Realignment Project. Over the years, the City completed design of the highway realignment and strategically acquired necessary property. In September, Cedar Park officially broke ground on this construction project that relocates a stretch of Bell Boulevard to the east. The road project is the critical path for the Bell Boulevard Redevelopment, yet it has proven to be the easy part of the redevelopment process.

Putting Together Pieces of the Puzzle

The next massive step – or steps – the City took before it searched for a master developer to take on the project was to assemble the 40 acres of needed land. The City already owned about 12 acres, but there were more than a dozen other individual property owners in the area. While some of the landowners approached the City to make a deal, the coordination and negotiation involved in the assemblage process was a significant task.

The City was able to leverage Community Development Type B community development funds from local sales tax to, over time, acquire about 28 acres of land from willing sellers – all done, without the use of eminent domain. This significant public investment will pay dividends for Cedar Park in the long run, as property values will rise sharply for this area and sales tax collections are projected to be on-trend with other parts of the City. Additionally, as land is leased and developed, it will pay for future phases. This public investment in private land strengthened the City’s leveraging position to attract experienced and quality master developers.
Have a well-organized, thorough, and thoughtful procurement process – and remember, the private sector is interviewing the public sector just as much as the public sector is interviewing the private one.

Take the partnership seriously and develop a collaborative, problem-solving relationship so that when things get difficult they can be worked-through.

The public sector entity needs to understand where their comfort level is with “dipping their toe” into private sector activities — and have an understanding of the private sector mindset.

Don’t underestimate the importance of gaining – and maintaining – both public and political support. It’s a long process, but support on all levels must be maintained.

Finding the Right Master Development Partner to Execute the Community’s Vision

The Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Master Plan is informed by redevelopment experts from across the nation, and is supported with financial modeling and forecasting for the public and private sectors.

The project has long been envisioned to be a public-private partnership, a model used for projects that are long-term, large-scale, and transformative. The P3 model creates a framework for sharing financial burden of a big project like this and sharing the upside benefits, and the master developer is directly accountable to the City. In project terms, the master developer is responsible for the execution of all aspects—design, engineering, construction of infrastructure, and ultimately creating a cohesive development that meets the market. At full build-out, the 40-acre Bell District is anticipated to include approximately 16 acres of greenspace, the City’s new library, a park and social hub, restaurants, multiple blocks of high-density residential – some with ground-floor retail – professional office space and individually-owned urban brownstones. With so much hanging in the balance, City leaders understood the importance of finding the right partner to realize the community’s vision.

In May of 2018, Cedar Park began the several months-long process of procuring a master developer. It began with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ). A committee comprised of the Mayor, City Council members, and key City staff reviewed proposals and chose two developers to respond to an invitation-only Request for Proposals (RFP) in September of that year. During the process, the City looked at needs and wants. One of the top wants was for the developer to consider placement of the new Cedar Park Public Library, also a 2015 voter-approved General Obligation Bond project, within the Bell District. Both developer finalists saw the
Library as having a potential to activate the development.

Knowing that this project’s lifespan was extensive, and that much of its success was contingent on an experienced developer and functioning partnership, the City was extremely careful in its consideration. The committee ultimately chose RedLeaf as the sole finalist to move forward in the Master Development Agreement negotiation process.

The key reason was the master developer’s strong expression of support for the community’s vision for placemaking within the Bell Boulevard District as the new civic heart for Cedar Park. Early on, in the selection process the City made a commitment to take the time to find the right master developer and build and maintain the relationship so that if or when things become difficult, they could be resolved. It felt more like a relationship and less like a transaction, it was said at the time the committee made its selection.

The developer the committee choses is an Austin-based commercial real estate firm whose cornerstone projects are known for transforming communities. Their portfolio includes working with public entities such as cities and educational campuses like Austin Community College. In addition to the P3 Highland Mall redevelopment with Austin Community College, they were co-developer for La Frontera Plaza in Round Rock, and master developer for the City of Austin Planning and Development Center in Highland.

Cedar Park and the master developer spent all of 2019 negotiating the Master Development Agreement, inking the deal in February 2020. This was a much faster process than what is often seen with other entities, and is a testament to the City and developer’s commitment to focus on the project. The master developer describes the Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Project as the right opportunity in the right place and at the right time – a rare opportunity to be part of a project with regional significance and generational impact.

From the get-go, the goal was to build something special that reflects the community’s vision. In June 2019, the City and master developer teamed up to host “A Day in the Bell District”, a community event to test some ideas and concepts. By this time, the library has evolved into a critical part of making this development an energized, vibrant district. More than 600 community members turned out to express their excitement surrounding the project.

Construction on the road realignment is scheduled to finish by the end of 2021; at that point, the construction of the Bell District can begin. While the term of the agreement is for 20 years, it is our collective plan to complete the development in 10 to 12 years. Suffice it to say that the Bell Boulevard Redevelopment Project has been a long time in the making, and has a long way to go before completion. It’s important to remember that projects of this magnitude don’t happen overnight. Neither does the relationship that evolves between the city, developer, and community.

The developer told us early on that places are defined by the people – that people are not defined by the place. We’ve learned the same can be said about P3s. They are defined by the people. ★

For more information on the Bell Redevelopment Project, visit www.DestinationBellBlvd.com.
COMMUNICATING, CONNECTING, AND MYTHS

By Terry L. Sumerlin, Author and Speaker

One of my favorite writers, Sydney J. Harris, was a longtime columnist for the Chicago Daily News. Known for his penetrating and thought-provoking comments on people and life, he made this often-quoted observation: “Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”

Are we getting through? If not, why not? I’m not smart enough to know all of the reasons. However, from personal experience as well as from platform experience presenting on communication and people skills, I’ve concluded that most communication fails for one major reason: we have bought into certain myths regarding the process. Let’s examine four myths that prevent effective virtual and/or “mask-to-mask” communication and, as a result, prevent connecting with others.

Myth #1 -- We communicate when we talk.

Though we generally communicate when we talk, we often make erroneous assumptions about talking. First, we assume that talking is the only means of communication. It’s not. We’ll cover that in Myth #2. We also tend to make an incorrect assumption about the communication process. We assume that all talking is communicating. Consider this: we communicate successfully when the other person receives the message we intended to convey. Conversely, we communicate unsuccessfully when they don’t receive that message, regardless of the message we intended. At such times, we talk but we don’t communicate or we miscommunicate.

Unfortunately, many put all of the emphasis on the message sent rather than on the all-important message received. Again, “communication is getting through.”

Myth #2 -- We can choose to not communicate.

It is true that we can stop using words, if that is what one means by “not communicate.” It is not true that we are able to not communicate. Words are only one form of communication. The most powerful form is body language. In fact, body language provides an excellent clue as to why we often fail with words. It’s because our words are saying one thing while our body language is saying something else. For example, I may claim to be happy. But if I forget to tell my face that I’m happy, the message received is, “Terry’s not happy.” Similarly, a person may say, “I just don’t have anything to say.” However, body language might say that there is more going on than is being admitted.

In light of this, we must guard against sending messages of anger, boredom, insecurity, frustration, or nervousness during those times when we’re unaware that we’re communicating anything at all. We are always communicating.

Myth #3 -- People skills don’t matter in communication.

Think for a moment of a great communicator. Who comes to mind? It might be someone you know personally, or maybe someone you don’t know. It could be someone
either living or deceased. Perhaps it’s someone who is famous. Whoever that person is, think about what makes them a great communicator. Is it just the ability to put words together in speaking or writing? That’s certainly a vital part of exceptional communication. People skills are also vital! If, as we’ve noted, communication is mostly about the message received and if no one wants to receive our message because of who we are, what difference does it make how well we deliver it?

Most great communicators are the type of people who others want to listen to. They’ve earned that right through great people skills.

**Myth #4 -- One size fits all in communication.**

We’re all familiar with the “fits all” concept in certain types of apparel. It generally means that the items thus produced are cheaper to make and to buy. Communication is much different. One size does not fit all. Also, effective communication, unlike mass produced items, doesn’t come cheaply. The price involves lots of personal effort and an individualized approach.

For instance, some people are introverts and some are extroverts. Some are get-it-doners, some are get-it-righters. Some are leaders, some are followers. We’re all different. We respond to different communication styles. Great communicators know this, and tailor their approach. Poor communicators just say whatever pops into their head, and then let the other person figure it out – or not. Afterwards, the poor communicator can’t figure out what went wrong. “All I said was…” The question is: what got through?.

**CONNECTOR TIP:** Great communication begins with understanding that it’s about the message received.

Terry L. Sumerlin is a professional speaker and accomplished author. To learn more, visit terrysumerlin.com or contact him at terry@terrysumerlin.com.
@cityofmcallen
McAllen’s Newest Mural: @popp_ultre and his amazing piece of art capture the true heroism and heart of McAllen Police Officers Edelmiro Garza Jr. and Ismael Chavez and Texas State Trooper Moises Sanchez. They will forever be watching over our community. #InOurHearts

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**Legislative Preview Webinar: What to Expect This Session**  
Thursday, January 14 – 10:30-11:30 a.m.

**Legislative Status Report Webinar #1: Keep Your Finger on the Pulse**  
Thursday, March 11 – 10:30-11:30 a.m.

**Legislative Status Report Webinar #2: Be Heard at the Capitol**  
Thursday, April 8 – 10:30-11:30 a.m.

**Legislative Status Report Webinar #3: What to Expect in the Final Days**  
Thursday, May 6 – 10:30-11:30 a.m.

**Legislative Wrap-Up: An Insider’s Perspective**  
Monday, June 21 – Workshop (Hilton Austin)

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