Community Building
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2022 Annual Conference Preview
Focus: Branding & Communications
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- DCA Issues Local Finance Notice to Provide Guidance on Utility Relief Measures
- FY2023 Budget Departmental Hearings Continue
- U.S. Department of Justice Announces COPS Funding Opportunity
- SCOTUS Issues Decisions in Case with Municipal Impact
- Biden Administration Releases Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Rural Playbook
- New Jersey Bans Single-Use Plastic Products to Begin May 4
- Office of Legislative Services and Department of Treasury Give Testimony on FY2023

Stay up-to-date on legislation affecting your municipality
The League’s Legislative Blog provides detailed information on bills and in-depth bill histories.
Focus:
Branding & Communications

Features

6 **UpFront Focus Bike with a Bunny Parade**
Hundreds roll out for Hazlet’s spring event
Christina Johnson, Public Information Officer, Hazlet Township

16 **Municipalities and Marijuana**
Two mayors observe local impacts on the opening of adult-use recreational marijuana retailers in their towns
Paul Medany, Mayor, Deptford; John Ryan, Mayor, Lawrence; Amy Spiezio, Managing Editor, *NJ Municipalities* Magazine

18 **Spotlight on Public Health**
Municipal governments have a responsibility to help residents live healthier lives
Devra Keenan, Mayor, & Devangi Patel, Health Officer, Montgomery Township

22 **Focus Setting the Scene**
Successfully marketing your downtown
Susan Adelizzi-Schmidt, MBA, President, Suasion Communications Group

26 **Franklin Lakes Centennial**
Pride in our past, faith in our future
Frank Bivona, Mayor, & Dina Robinson, Community Director, Franklin Lakes

30 **Focus App to It**
Community expands outreach efforts with Evesham Connect app
Zane Clark, Director of Public Information, Evesham Township

34 **Focus Local TV**
How municipal channels helped fight the pandemic
Bob Duthaler, President, Jersey Access Group

38 **Focus Updating Websites**
Woodbridge Township revitalizes communications efforts with redesigned website
Megan Kushpa, Mayor’s Office of Communications, Township of Woodbridge

40 **Get Covered New Jersey**
How New Jersey’s State-based exchange is making health coverage more accessible
Marlene Caride, Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance

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42 **Conference Connections: Invitation to the Annual League Conference**

45 **2022 Conference Preview**
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Spreading the Word: Community Communications

In the municipal world, lots of the day-to-day work is face-to-face. Meetings, inspections, court work, and other everyday functions ground to a halt during the pandemic and left communities working out just how to reach out and get functions fully functional again.

And you succeeded! This month’s communications and branding focus covers the success stories of municipalities across the state as they strove to maintain community knowledge and spirit throughout the pandemic and beyond. Special events like Hazlet’s Bike with a Bunny events (p. 6) and Franklin Lake’s Centennial Celebration (p. 26) captured moments that burnished each town’s brand...what the residents valued most and why they continue to call their communities home.

In the last two years, there have been considerable efforts to keep basic communications functions going—and growing. The municipalities sharing their stories in this issue show that creativity and innovation can be key tools in the kit of emergency management. Evesham’s App, Woodbridge’s Website, and TV stations run by Jersey Access Group (JAG) members all over the state stepped in to provide new lines of communications to residents and many of the lessons learned will be carried on into the future.

At the League, we’ve also been working on our communications tools to keep members in touch. In addition to columns like Local Governing and articles providing takeaway lessons for municipalities, the other team members at the League have been pushing innovations for information distribution including the legislative team’s blog, The Town Crier, as well as their Lunch and Learn webinars (visit www.njlm.org/LunchAndLearn to watch). The education folks are ready to roll out the return to in-person One-Day Mini-Conference this month (www.njlm.org/miniconf), which will provide plenty of CEU credits for licensed professionals as well as useful information on a broad range of subject for elected officials.

Finally, we are all working toward the next League Conference, our 107th Annual event. This issue provides you with introduction to the event with a preliminary schedule and list of exhibitors starting on page 45. We’ve also included an invitation for all local government officials and those who work with them to attend the event in Atlantic City Nov. 15-17. We hope you take us up on that invite and enjoy your summer. Please keep in touch with your article and column ideas for the fall editions, we look forward to working together Building for Tomorrow!

Michael Cerra

PS: Register today for the League’s Mini-Conference 2022, scheduled for June 15 at the Conference Center at Mercer in West Windsor, marking another return to in-person events. For more information, visit www.njlm.org/miniconf.
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Bike with a Bunny Parade
Hundreds roll out for Hazlet’s spring event

The feeling that comes from riding a bike is one of total liberation—and that is exactly the feeling Hazlet Township was aiming for with its new “Bike with a Bunny” parade.

The idea for the springtime group bike ride came out of the winter of 2020, when the pandemic kept children at home in virtual school, isolated from one another to prevent spread of COVID-19. Kids missed physical activity and friends, and concern was rising about their well-being. Hazlet’s Recreation Advisory Committee met monthly via Zoom, optimistically talking about the day they could hold in-person events again.

Something to look forward to
“We wanted our first event in 2021 to be something the kids could look forward to,” said Chris McManus, the committee’s president at the time, and now the director of Hazlet Recreation. “The priority was to plan something like a kickoff to spring. It had to be outdoors, active, and fun.”
Member $20 • Non-Member $30

2022 Municipal Directory: Desktop reference guide containing contact information for NJ’s 564 municipalities. Print and PDF versions available
Member $35 (print or PDF)  Non-Member $45 (print or PDF)

NJ Municipalities Magazine: Monthly magazine and the official publication of NJLM. Serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information on municipal affairs for public officials. Combined print and digital subscription.
Nine-month subscription: Member $25 • Non-Member $30 (Single copies also available)

Member $12 • Non-member $14

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):
Member $13 • Non-member $15

Brownfield Properties 2nd Edition: Examines the factors that have contributed to the “Brownfield Phenomena” with federal and state legislation.
Member $28 • Non-Member $30

Building Economic Development at the Local Level Primer 8th Edition: Municipalities can sustain and build their own economic base as they contemplate a formal economic development plan.
Member $35 • Non-Member $60

Faulkner Act: New Jersey Optional Charter Law. $12 for All

Legislative Bulletin (yearly subscription): Bills signed into law affecting municipalities.
Member $7 • Non-Member $12

Local Public Contracts Law Series 1 (2014)
Member $60 • Non-Member $120

Member $60 • Non-Member $120

Local Government Ethics Law (2014)
Member $12 • Non-Member $14

License Volume 1: Mercantile, Peddler, Solicitor, Canvasser & Itinerant Vendor Fee; Vending Machine/Taxi and Limousine Fees (2016).
Member $50 • Non-Member $65 (electronic)

License Volume 2: Alarm Fees and False Alarm Penalties (2016)/Landlord Registration.
Member $30 • Non-Member $39 (electronic)

License Volume 3: Dog & Cat Licensing Fees; Liquor License Fees, Auction Fees (2016).
Member $40 • Non-Member $52 (electronic)

Limited Time Offer – License Volumes 1, 2 & 3 at a discounted price!
Member $100 • Non-member $136 (electronic)

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License Volume 5: Construction & Building Fees (2015): Member $50 • Non-member $100

New Jersey 5 Traditional Forms of Government: New Jersey townships, villages, boroughs, cities and towns.
$12 for All

NJ Mayors Healthy Cookbook: Healthy Recipes from Elected Officials.
$10 for All

Member $20 • Non-Member $25

Open Public Records Act OPRA: Quick guide provides introduction to the Right to Know Law.
Member $12 • Non-Member $14

Overview of NJ Personnel Policies with MEL-JIF (2015)
Member $12 • Non-Member $14

Police/Fire Labor Data Service: Annual Subscription. Tracks trends in police and fire contract settlements and arbitration.
Electronic only:
Full: Members $320 • Non-Members $500
Police: Members $280 • Non-Members $400
Fire: Members $240 • Non-members $340

Protecting Your Towns Environment (2017): Provides overview of key environmental issues confronting New Jersey municipalities.
Member $13 • Non-Member $15

Electronic only: Member $90 • Non-Member $180

For additional information, or to order any publications, visit www.njlm.org/publications or contact Suzanne Allen at 609-695-3481x129 or sallen@njlm.org
The committee brainstormed possibilities and produced the idea of a group bike ride with a spring Bunny as the mascot, while still following the Governor’s social distancing orders. “We knew it would be a hit in Hazlet,” he said.

The first year, 200 kids on bikes gathered in assigned groups at the Airport Plaza shopping mall parking lot for the 1.7-mile flat ride on closed road all the way to Veterans Park. Some had decorated their bicycles and helmets with streamers and bunny ears. They were excited to see the Bunny arrive to lead the way.

With police securing the roadway, the kids pedaled off surrounded by their parents and friends, exhilarated by this new experience. Two groups of dancers from The Perna Dance Center performed routines. Families gathered on sidewalks and porches to cheer everyone on. At the entrance to the park, the riders delighted in riding through a tunnel of loud, energetic music created by the drums and brass of the Raritan High School Marching Band.

**Second-year success**

When the event returned this spring, registration quickly filled up with over 240 kids. This time there was a wide variety of wheeled vehicles arriving at the

---

**In Your Town**

If you plan a bike parade:

- Avoid obstacles to stop parade. Allow bikers to pedal freely at their own pace.
- Allow parents to accompany riders.
- Fold bike safety and fitness concepts into the event.

Plan ahead with police to close a long, flat road with parking at either end.

- Dancers on foot are a great way to end the procession.
- Incorporate exciting music with a marching band or recorded music.
- Encourage neighbors to watch and cheer on the kids.
Airport Plaza lot. Mr. and Mrs. Bunny traveled the route, waving to riders on colorful Surrey Bikes, zippy scooters, vintage cruisers and bikes hauling canopy carriers with toddlers inside.

The local Boy Scout Troop set up a station to check out bikes and pump air into tires. Families with kids under six were invited to launch from a school closer to the park, an easier ride for shorter legs. Parents chatted as they strolled with baby carriages, and others pulled red wagons or pushed toddlers in plastic race cars. Once inside the park, at the gazebo by the lake, a line formed to take photos with the Bunny under a flowering tree.

“This event was so fun, and it really brings families and our town together for a day,” said Deputy Mayor Mike Glackin, who is the Recreation Committee liaison. “Our police secure the roads, the fire trucks sound their sirens at the front, and the first aid ambulance is at the rear in case anyone needs help. With the residents watching on the sidewalks, it really brings that hometown-parade feeling.”

June 2022
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NJLM on the Road

Recently NJLM President Mayor William Pikolycky of Woodbine was doing the League’s work around the state. He represented the organization at the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce’s ReNew Jersey Business Summer 2022: A Time for Answers held in Atlantic City. Here he’s shown with Atlantic City Mayor and NJLM Executive Board Member Marty Small Sr.

In addition, President Pikolycky led League staff in a meeting with New Jersey Civil Service Commission Chair and CEO, Deirdre Webster Cobb, Esq., at the commission’s Trenton offices. The Civil Service Commission recently released a Telework Pilot Program for Executive Branch State Employees that may inspire future municipal standards.

League Affiliate and Conference Prep Meeting Held

The League met with representatives from its 21 Affiliate organizations and New Jersey Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver in her role as Commissioner of the Department of Communities Affairs to review topics of concern. Lt. Gov. Oliver spoke about topics ranging from COVID recovery to affordable housing, answering questions from Affiliate representatives about supportive housing, stormwater management, and other relevant topics.

In the afternoon, the Affiliates discussed Conference preparations with League leadership and staff. Here are photos from the event.
The League’s Lunch & Learn webinar series continues to provide in-depth information on up-to-the-minute topics impacting municipalities from COVID recovery to climate concerns.

On May 3, a Lunch and Learn briefing was held with Charles Small, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Intergovernmental Affairs Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation discussing municipal funding in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), and insights on the new federal Commercial Drivers’ License rules from Nickki McDavid, Chief, Commercial Driver’s License Division, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

On April 27, 2022, the Lunch & Learn was a cybersecurity briefing with Krista Valenzuela, Senior Cyber Threat Intelligence Analyst, New Jersey Cybersecurity & Communications Integration Cell. The briefing discussed cybersecurity best practices and what municipalities should do to prevent a cyber incident.

@Missed the webinars? They can be viewed from the League’s Lunch & Learn page, www.njlm.org/LunchAndLearn
Directory Updates
Please note the following 2022 Municipal Directory Updates

Affiliate Associations
Municipal Clerks’ Association of NJ
88 Inskip Avenue
Ocean Grove, NJ 07756

NJ State Fire Prevention & Protection Association
rsfireinv@optonline.net

Bogota Borough
Municipal Clerk:
Yenlys Flores-Bolivard (acting)

Dover Town
Address: 37 North Sussex Street
Dover, NJ 07801-3906

Frankford Township
Mayor: Emery Castimore Jr.

Lacey Township
Mayor: Mark Dykoff

Pitman Borough
Address: 110 S. Broadway

Rochelle Park Borough
Municipal Clerk:
Annemarie Wells (acting)
Clerk@rochelleparknj.gov

Tinton Falls Borough
Administrator: Charles W. Terefenko

Union Beach Borough
Mayor: Charles W. Cocuzza

Union City
Municipal Clerk:
Hilda I. Rosario (acting)
hrosario@ucnj.com

Send in Your News!
NJ Municipalities offers a network of your peers in local government—do you have a story to share? Whether it’s a news item, op-ed, feature, or column, your insights drive this publication.

The June issue marks the beginning of our pause for the summer, but we’re actively looking for articles for the fall issues and deadlines will roll around sooner than you think! Due dates are August 10 for the October issue, September 15 for the November issue, and October 15 for the December issue.

If you’d like to send something in, you can get the submission guidelines from www.njlm.org/magazine or reach out to Managing Editor Amy Spiezio at aspiezio@njlm.org

Health & Safety Notice: To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, we recommend that attendees at our in-person events wear a face mask regardless of vaccination status.

15 NJLM Mini Conference
Conference Center at Mercer, West Windsor
Visit www.njlm.org/seminars or contact Danielle Holland-Htut at dhtut@njlm.org or 609-695-3481, Ext. 118.

12 www.njlm.org/njmunicipalities | June 2022
This year’s Local Government Week was a success around the state, with municipalities taking part in a week-long celebration to raise awareness about the importance of municipal government and its daily impact on residents.

Clinton Town hosted a Kids Town Hall, Fitness Trail Walk with Mayor and Council, and Touch-a-Truck this week to celebrate NJ Local Government, as well as other activities.

Deptford kicked off #njlocalgovt week with Deptford Township Mayor Paul Medany and the Township Council conducting a mock council meeting with students from Deptford Middle School and Deptford Township High School. Deptford Township School District Students also had presentations by the Deptford Township Police Department, Deptford Township Fire Department and the Gloucester County Emergency Management.

Evesham Township celebrated NJ Local Government Week by highlighting its amazing volunteer boards and committees on its website and social media throughout the week. Evesham Township also announced the launch of Evesham Connect, a new mobile app for citizen engagement. This new app will place a full assortment of Evesham Township’s municipal services and information right in the palm of residents’ hands. (see feature pg. 30) They capped off local government week with “Coffee with Mayor and Council.”

Garwood Mayor Todisco held a Mayor’s Breakfast to celebrate #NJLocalGovt! Mayor Todisco is also a member of NJLM’s Executive Board. The town also held Coffee with a Cop, Bingo Night, Storytime in the Library, Virtual Kids Craft, Students in Government Night, Regular Meeting of the Mayor and Council, Virtual New Jersey State Parks Presentation, Classic Move Friday, Exercise Class from the Garwood Mayors Wellness Campaign, and the
Eggscavenger Hunt from the Garwood Celebrations Committee.

In Hillsborough, Mayor Shawn Lipani presented a proclamation recognizing April 3-9 as New Jersey Local Government Week at the March 22 Committee meeting. After the proclamation was read, Township Administrator Anthony Ferrara spoke of the dedication and sacrifices made by township employees during the COVID-10 pandemic and more recently, during Tropical Storm Ida in September.

Middle Township posted informative items to inform the community about their local government’s activities noting: “We’re celebrating NJ Local Government Week with salutes to the Middle workers who make our town such a great place to live and do business.” They discussed the work of the Public Works crews, Construction, Finance, Grants & Economic Development, and Zoning departments and more.

Township of North Bergen celebrated NJ Local Government week when 9 high school students distributed reusable bags to promote ecological awareness and NJ’s upcoming ban on plastic bags. At midday these students visited the Woodcliff Water Treatment Plant for an in-depth lesson on wastewater management, where the MUA Executive Director, Plant Supervisor, & Assistant Supervisor explained how the plant works to cleanse stormwater gathered from storm drains.

In Scotch Plains, the week’s highlights included Councilmember Ellen Zimmerman talking with Director of Redevelopment Tom Strowe about business development in the community and upcoming investments to revitalize our downtown district.

West Deptford Township also shared information about how local government “is dedicated to making sure our residents have some of the best equipment and services around!” Their social media post said: “Take a look at our camera unit. Our new piping trailer unit helps keep our infrastructure in the best condition possible. This equipment allows the Public Works department to evaluate underground storm water and sewer piping and is used to plan and prioritize locations that are in need of repair. With this equipment the current Township Committee has made it clear that they are committed to upgrading our Township’s infrastructure.”

The DCA and DLGS supported local government week, too, talking about how their work dovetails with that of local governments, providing technical and financial assistance in budgeting, financial reporting, joint services, purchasing, and management issues in all 564 municipalities in the State of New Jersey. ¶

Recreational Marijuana

Municipalities and Marijuana
Two mayors observe local impacts on the opening of adult-use recreational marijuana retailers in their towns

Paul Medany, Mayor, Deptford; John Ryan, Mayor, Lawrence Township (Mercer); Amy Spiezio, Managing Editor, NJ Municipalities Magazine

Afteter months of opting in, opting out, and a variety of rule setting processes, the first day of adult-use cannabis in April attracted 12,000 customers to 12 dispensaries around the state.

“We expected sales to be substantial and the data shows that the market is effectively serving both adult-use consumers and patients,” said Jeff Brown, executive director of the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission (CRC). “We continue to monitor inventory and access for patients and are prepared to take enforcement action against any ATC that does not meet the requirements for patient access and supply.”

On the local level, the host communities of the 12 newly opened cannabis dispensaries across the state experienced long lines but reports from the CRC and local officials alike were that everything was running smoothly.

We spoke with Mayor John Ryan of Lawrence Township (Mercer) and Mayor Paul Medany of Deptford about their experiences with their community’s newest businesses.

Hopes for the future
Both Ryan and Medany were optimistic about positive outcomes for the dispensaries.

“Lawrence Township has navigated through the medicinal and recreational marijuana maze in a way that gives me great confidence that the dispensaries will only bring the positives to the community and will be seamlessly accepted by our broader business community,” said Mayor Ryan.

In Deptford, the medical marijuana dispensary has been open since last October, and the retail establishment is an addition that fits in with the community’s plans, Mayor Medany notes.

“Our economic development team has a goal of attracting a variety of business uses with one of our focuses on the medical profession,” he said. “We also concentrate on filling vacancies in storefronts as opposed to building new. This business filled both of the needs. It is a beautiful facility, the architecture inside is very welcoming and professionally designed.”

Lawrence passed an ordinance that creates a limited district (along U.S. Route 1) where dispensaries may operate. Mayor Ryan noted, “This district is away from residential homes and neighborhoods, and the locations are best described as destination sites within our most commercial zone. In addition, we have limited the number of adult-use recreational dispensaries to not more than two in our town.”

Retail cannabis was seen as a potential lever to grow other businesses in Deptford. “Our goal was to fill a need in the demand for the products this company provides while attracting a new customer base to our retail district,” Mayor Medany said. “All of these objectives have been met. The customer demand has exceeded expectations with great reviews. Another result is the ability to collect a sales tax to help reduce our resident’s property tax burden.”

Community resources
While the new revenue stream is in its early days, both mayors were optimistic about the potential stresses on their municipal resources from public health and safety perspectives.

“The impacts have actually been beneficial,” Medany noted, adding that police presence has been minimal thanks to good preparation. “Security issues were worked out at the planning stages and have gone according to plan. The opening of recreational sales created a one-day surge. There was a line of customers that first day who waited patiently with no incidents.”

Since the opening there has been a steady flow of customers, which has boosted the local economy, Medany said. “These patrons are actually visiting the surrounding stores and businesses which has created the desired effect of a new customer base. There have been no negative health issues. Conversely, the dispensary is filling a medicinal need that is helping a variety of patients. Veterans are one of the customer bases and that has been beneficial also.”

Mayor Ryan said that Zen Leaf “has been a popular site with well-mannered visitors lined in an orderly queue to enter the facility.” The dispensary has its own security staff on-site and out front providing direction to patrons with parking, etc. “Also, our police department is mindful of the increased activity in the area and giving it the extra attention needed to maintain public safety,” Ryan added. “So far, we are pleased with the opening and Zen Leaf’s ability to manage it properly.”
In Your Town

When asked what advice they had for other municipalities considering allowing cannabis retailers.

Deptford’s Mayor Paul Medany said:

• **First find** an operator or company that either has the experience and financial backing or has partnered with an experienced business to ensure a smooth progression from planning to actually opening and operating.

• **Make sure** your residents are in favor of this type of business. Examine what the benefits to your community are and what the negatives could be.

• **Consult with** your police and public safety director. Locate the business in a zone with the desired impact.

• **Explore** the benefits of collecting the sales tax.

• **Do research** on the history of Cannabis. Educate yourself on why it is classified as schedule 1 drug. Know that the federal government still impedes in depth research on the effects of cannabis since the DEA limits the amount and places that can do extensive research.

• **Look** at the public demand and benefits.

Lawrence Township’s Mayor John Ryan said:

• It’s important that you **don’t fear it**, and that knowledge is critical.

• **Do your best to understand** why the residents of the state overwhelmingly support the recreational use of marijuana.

• **Create and implement a plan** that best addresses your community’s needs and concerns.

• **Make sure** that the companies that want to operate within your community are well established in the industry, have the proper funding to do things right, comply with the strict standards set by the State of New Jersey, and are willing to work with you to address community concerns.

---

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Among our many duties, public health and safety is a top priority for any municipal leader. We have a responsibility to provide residents with the protection and resources they need to live healthy lives, in a receptive manner that fosters consensus solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a new spotlight on the importance of public health, but our community has been squarely focused on implementing health-protective practices for many years—efforts we credit for saving lives.

Montgomery Township has undertaken numerous initiatives and made changes to improve community health and the channels in which we deliver it. The public health mission goes back in time across several mayors, and it’s important to recognize the important work done by our predecessors, including recently retired health officer Stephanie D. Carey and former mayor Sadaf Jaffer, now an Assemblywoman, for their extensive work that culminated in Montgomery Township’s Public Health Accreditation, one of only three municipalities in the state to earn this distinction.

Fighting vaping

In 2017, Montgomery Township began efforts to create a healthier community when the issue of youth vaping dominated headlines across the nation. With nearly 25% of Montgomery Township residents under 18, we felt the urgency of addressing this issue. To do so, the Health Department implemented the Tobacco-Free Community Initiative from Tobacco-Free for a Healthy New Jersey (TFHNJ) and Sustainable Jersey, to assist officials in protecting our youth and broader community from tobacco use, vaping, and secondhand smoke.

Under the initiative outreach materials, prevention and cessation resources, and promotional assets were used to educate residents about the dangers of tobacco and benefits of tobacco-free designations. TFHNJ assisted the Health Department in implementing ways to productively engage and solicit feedback from residents, because the success of community-wide change depends so much on support within the community.
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Soon after, the Health Department held forums and community meetings to brainstorm ways to improve public health as it relates to tobacco use. Residents and officials collaborated to compile a list of practicable actions to better protect our youth and wider community from tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure. Insights from community members left officials with a clear plan of action.

In parallel, officials branded the community as “smoke-free” and “tobacco-free” using TFHNJ signage clearly stating that tobacco use of any kind was prohibited. Signs were posted around schools, parks and businesses to reinforce tobacco-free areas and create unified, pro-health messaging.

What it takes to succeed

This initiative, an early effort in our mission to improve public health and how we communicate it with residents, helped officials understand what it takes to succeed in community-wide efforts. Engaging in dialogue is vital, but so are informational and educational resources, along with signage and toolkits that reinforce a single, branded theme that is recognizable to anyone.

We are proud to be the only New Jersey municipality to fulfill all requirements to gain the Tobacco-Free Community designation from TFHNJ and Sustainable Jersey. This could not have happened without our community’s willingness to face the health and safety challenges posed by tobacco use. We minimized youth access, successfully branded our community as tobacco-free, and strengthened our relationships with residents, an effective model of municipality-resident collaboration.

COVID connection

The value of a connected community cannot be emphasized enough. With the knowledge gained from resident feedback, that local ordinances were among the strongest methods of protection. The development of the ordinances was made easier by Tobacco-Free for a Healthy New Jersey (TFHNJ)-provided ordinance templates and expertise in collaboration with the Public Health Law Center.

The Township enacted two measures:

- Ordinance 3-18, prohibiting smoking on Township property, and Board of Health.
- Ordinance 3A, reiterating the prohibition of underage tobacco transactions, setting enforcement guidelines, and, most important, requiring a license from the Township Board of Health to sell electronic tobacco and nicotine delivery products or devices.

Ordinances for Smoke-Free Communities

The Health Department and Board of Health agreed, with support from resident feedback, that local ordinances were among the strongest methods of protection. The development of the ordinances was made easier by Tobacco-Free for a Healthy New Jersey (TFHNJ)-provided ordinance templates and expertise in collaboration with the Public Health Law Center.

The Township enacted two measures:

- Ordinance 3-18, prohibiting smoking on Township property, and Board of Health.
- Ordinance 3A, reiterating the prohibition of underage tobacco transactions, setting enforcement guidelines, and, most important, requiring a license from the Township Board of Health to sell electronic tobacco and nicotine delivery products or devices.

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engagements, the Health Department felt better prepared to pursue further action supporting our community mission of improving public health. This turned out to be crucial when COVID-19 struck in 2020.

The pandemic required significant communications efforts amid so much misinformation and little guidance on how communities should operate. This period demanded a level of attention never seen before, so Montgomery Township used grant money to double the staff of the Health Department and expand communications, operations, and capacity to better support residents.

During this time, we found the most important channels of communication to be trusted people: family, friends, personal physicians, faith leaders, and community leaders. When residents deemed someone a reliable source, they felt more comfortable with and trusting in the information provided. When the information was scientific, backed by credible sources and evidence, then it was worth providing to residents, regardless of the polarizing nature of facts. Along with delivering the latest reliable information to residents through trusted channels, we recognized the front-and-center role that the Health Department needed to play as residents looked for guidance.

Newsletters from the Health Department were delivered to all households, emphasizing pro-health messages, the latest data and answers to common questions. When residents still had reservations or concerns, the Health Department held clinics and answered questions by phone. In such a health-conscious period, we wanted residents to feel more connected to and protected by those in government.

A key strategy aiding our communicative efforts was “social norming.” By showing residents the high vaccination rates and data points from other residents in Montgomery Township, we reinforced the idea that most friends and neighbors were making the decision to vaccinate, which made residents more comfortable and encouraged to get vaccinated.

As a result, in May 2021 Montgomery had 46 cases per 1,000 population, fewer than nearby towns and half as much as the state as a whole. When the Biden Administration set a target date of July 4, 2021 to reach a 75% adult vaccination rate, Montgomery Township was at 89%. Now, as efforts continue, we are at 68% of eligible people vaccinated and boosted, versus the state average of 55%.

**Investment in communications**

Since we began our mission, we’ve made an extensive investment in public health and related communications. The expanded capabilities, and subsequent expertise, have led our township to provide public health services to nearby communities through shared service agreements.

None of this happened overnight. Rather, the steady and purposeful investment of time and money, and our emphasis on communications, has paid dividends as residents feel better protected, more involved in public health matters, and more trusting in the decision-making of our Health Department.

Municipal governments can play a significant role in improving the health and quality of life of those living and working within the community. As municipal leaders, we can develop smart public policies and offer resources, but none of that matters without effective communications and outreach to engage residents and encourage pro-health behavior.
Setting the Scene
Successfully marketing your downtown

Susan Adelizzi-Schmidt, MBA, President,
Suasion Communications Group

The following is a reprint from Downtown New Jersey’s newsletter.

New Jersey’s downtowns are reaping the benefits of implementing robust branding, marketing, and public relations campaigns. No matter the size of the town, promoting its unique assets spurs economic development, tourism, new business, and job growth.

Each town offers a specific set of rich assets that sets them apart from other destinations. These assets may include shopping, dining, attractions, local culture, or distinct experiences.

A downtown, like any place that delivers an experience, should have a strong brand that is consistently pulled through all marketing platforms, from advertising campaigns to wayfinding signage. Most successful branding initiatives involve community members and downtown business owners.

Here’s a handy list of several of the top marketing and PR initiatives to consider:

**Brand Discovery**

Distinguishing a town from the rest is the first step in marketing and branding what it has to offer. Whether offerings include attractions, recreational opportunities, events, dining, shopping, arts/historic/educational experiences, tours, or entertainment venues, initiating a brand discovery process will assist with uncovering all your town’s jewels. Also, consider convenience-oriented amenities including transit, major highway access, schools, overall quality of life, parking, and outdoor physical recreation such as walking, running, and biking as well as pet-friendly areas.

Successful branding also includes a storytelling narrative that has been properly vetted and will serve as the script across all channels, including the website, social media, newsletters, advertising, and marketing.

**Logo & Tagline**

Once brand discovery is complete, logo and tagline creation often are the next projects in the process. A town can be unified with a common theme that starts with a simple logo design. Keep in mind that a great logo will follow the simple KISS rule (Keep It Simple Sweetheart) and may be reflective of the town’s signature asset.

Taglines should be exclusive to a location; avoid anything generic like ‘It’s all here’ or ‘There is something for everyone.’ The tagline should convey something specifically compelling about a location and spark visitor’s imagination as well as pride among the local residents.

**Websites**

A website showcasing a town should be rich with visuals and information. Maintain a sense of cohesive and robust aesthetics throughout each page. The website design should be mobile friendly (easily view and navigate the website from a phone) and include search engine optimization and key words to describe your town’s locations, activities, events, hotels, restaurants, and other highlights.

Some other popular options to consider are mobile apps, blogs, video/photo galleries, FAQs and event calendars. The website serves as a window to the world and should integrate the brand and highlight all your town’s unique assets. Don’t forget to add Google Analytics to track website visitors and acquire additional information.
Social Media

With billions of daily users, many people now depend on Facebook as their primary source of information every day. Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn are also popular platforms used to establish an engaging social media presence. Each social media platform maintains a different tone and is used by different demographics. To engage with your audience, customize content for each platform that will ensure maximum performance for each post. Keep in mind that after establishing a social media presence, it must be maintained and monitored daily. Video is incredibly important in developing a robust social media presence.
**Marketing & Advertising Campaigns**

With clearly defined objectives, targets, and tactics, an ongoing marketing and advertising campaign will help maintain sustained public messaging. Today, online digital marketing, streaming, geofencing, and Google AdWords campaigns are often combined with traditional advertising strategies, like billboards, to achieve the desired impact.

In summary, establishing your town’s brand and communicating its unique story to visitors, residents, investors, and business owners will keep your town top-of-mind.

**Public Relations Campaigns**

Don’t underestimate the power of PR. A well-stratgized public relations campaign communicates key brand messages. Ongoing press releases, promotional events and tours will keep a town top-of-mind in the media and public eye.

Using the script established during the brand discovery process, a PR campaign can be developed and launched, focusing on assets, events, and personalities. An intensive program pitching media and media immersion events are pivotal for a successful PR strategy.

With offices in Somers Point & Haddonfield, NJ, Suasion Communications Group stands ready to assist New Jersey’s downtowns with customized branding, public relations, digital marketing, website design and communications campaigns. Suasion is an award-winning certified Woman-Owned Small Business Enterprise (WBE/SBE), celebrating its 15th anniversary in 2022. Visit suasionmarketing.com or call 609-653-0400, ext. 103.
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The Borough of Franklin Lakes in northwestern Bergen County was formed in March 1922 when it ceded from Franklin Township. In 2022, 100 years later, Franklin Lakes celebrates its Centennial year. The Borough is going all out in its celebration, with special events, banners, history education sessions, a full branding campaign including many promotional items, unearthing a time capsule and burying a new time capsule, a historical calendar, and a picture book on the Borough’s history.

Under the direction of the Borough’s Community Director Dina Robinson, last year the Borough formed a Centennial Committee, a large diverse group of residents, which met and continues to meet monthly. It is an eclectic group that all share a passion for Franklin Lakes and its rich history. The Centennial Committee has several subcommittees which are tasked with planning and implementing different elements of the Borough’s celebration.

The Borough’s Community Director, a position created a couple of years ago, is responsible for all of the Borough’s recreation programs, parks, its Mayors Wellness Campaign, and a wide range of Borough events, while also serving as a Wellness Ambassador for the Borough’s Employee Wellness Program.

The Mayor and Council provided sufficient funding to ensure that the Centennial would be memorable but, importantly, the significant cost is also offset by generous donations from several Borough businesses. The public outreach is extensive, driven by the Borough’s award-winning communications program and supplemented with paid ads and extensive press coverage.
The highlight of the Centennial celebration will be four marquee special events for the Franklin Lakes community:

• **“Speakeasy/Roaring 20s Gala”**
  Held Saturday, March 19 at the Indian Trail Club, residents were encouraged to come dressed as a flapper or as a gangster or a silent screen star. It was fun no matter the dress! The evening out with friends to celebrate 100 years of Franklin Lakes was a recreation of living during the Prohibition era in a throwback celebration. Era cocktails, bountiful fare, dancing, and rolling your own cigars were part of this event, with over 400 attendees, which sold out within 2.5 hours of the opening of ticket sales on January 1.

Franklin Lakes’ centennial anniversary year is going to be an exciting time highlighted by many special events.

• **Centennial Parade**
  In May members of the community were gathered along the parade route to cheer on Franklin Lakes to celebrate this special anniversary of 100 years. All local businesses and organizations were invited to enter a float that fits the parade’s centennial theme, “Pride in Our Past, Faith in Our Future.”
Other Highlights

Additional happenings during the centennial year include:

- **Calendar** The Borough sent out a Centennial calendar to all residents and businesses, with a portrait of its 1925 Mayor and Council on the cover and amazing historical photos featured each month, including historic landmarks, group portraits of the Police Department (circa 1963), Fire Department (circa 1935), and Ambulance Corps (1967), the General Store (circa 1895), schools, inns, mills, the airport and train stations.

- **Book** In May of 2022, a newly published book is scheduled to be released titled “Franklin Lakes, Images of America.” The book will be available for purchase online through the Borough’s Centennial website and in local stores.

- **Library** The Franklin Lakes Historical Society will host a series of guided tours and schedule lectures in conjunction with the Franklin Lakes Public Library.

- **Trees** The Borough’s Shade Tree Commission will sponsor the planting of 100 trees.

- **Commemorations** The Borough will sell commemorative clothing, specialty items, and recognize our lifelong residents.

- **Time capsule** A time capsule will be unearthed and a Centennial Time Capsule will be buried.

- **Events** A host of other small events will take place throughout the year.
After the Parade, there was live music, food trucks, beer and wine gardens, and lots of family fun activities behind Borough Hall.

- **Centennial Fireworks** This month, a celebration will begin with some family fun activities to include live music, a DJ, games, making s’mores with our safe custom table top fire pits, and other fun family activities. The evening will close with a spectacular firework show.

- **Centennial “Eats n’ Beats” Street Festival** at Veterans Plaza at the corner of Pulis Avenue and DeKorte Drive. On September 17, celebrate and enjoy live music, food trucks, beer garden, arts and crafts activities, and browsing vendor booths from local business and organizations.

Franklin Lakes’ centennial anniversary year is going to be an exciting time highlighted by many special events. With contributions from dozens of resident volunteers and support from our local sponsors, we are going to celebrate in a fashion fitting for such a great community. We are proud of our history and the town we have become and we look forward with excitement towards our future.

For additional information, visit www.FranklinLakesCentennial.com
Finding new ways to enhance communication between residents and their township is always at the forefront of the mind for Evesham Mayor Jaclyn Veasy.

“Every time we offer a new way for residents to communicate with our township, we know we’re making their lives that much easier.” Mayor Veasy said. “Every time we offer a new way for staff to communicate with residents, we know we’re making our services that much more efficient.”

For those reasons and more, Evesham Township was excited to launch “Evesham Connect,” a new mobile app for citizen engagement.

This new app places a full assortment of Evesham Township’s municipal services and information right in the palm of residents’ hands.

By seamlessly integrating with features that are already available on the township’s website, Evesham Connect allows residents to have even better access to the services they already utilize on a daily basis.
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Ask Evesham

Just one example is the township’s Ask Evesham online reporting system. This system already allowed residents to use the township website to have a direct line of communication with the township to request services, ask questions or report issues such as potholes or light outages.

“But now that residents have access to the Evesham Connect app, services such as Ask Evesham are just a few taps away, without residents having to worry about how their mobile web browser might load or format the system.

By the very nature and portability of mobile applications, Evesham Connect makes it even easier for residents to offer a new way for residents to communicate with our township, we know we’re making their lives that much easier.”

Full Spectrum of Communications

Although the township already employs a wide variety of communication platforms and services to deliver news to residents, Mayor Veasy believes Evesham Connect truly bolsters Evesham’s efforts to reach members of the public.

Website: “We take a lot of pride that our municipal website is easy to navigate and constantly updated with the most relevant information for residents – but it’s still up to residents to remember to periodically check the site.

Social media: “Our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts are also consistently updated with all the latest news from our township, but we’re subject to unknown algorithms that seemingly place information in front of some residents’ feeds, while leaving others out.

Newsletter and other media: “We even send out a weekly email newsletter, and all of our council, planning and zoning meetings are broadcast on our website and public access TV channels - but those platforms don’t necessarily reach residents directly with late-breaking or unexpected news.”
report issues as they first notice them when visiting one of the township’s facilities or walking along one of the townships streets.

And that’s just one integration out of many.

**Other options**

If residents want to reserve a field/court, Evesham Connect also links to the township’s online registration system. If residents want to register for a rec program, the app will feed to that registration system as well.

Or if residents want to pay their tax bills or sign their kids up for the township’s summer camp, Evesham Connect is integrated into those online payment systems, too.

Yet perhaps one of the most important features of Evesham Connect isn’t just how the app gives residents the ability to access the township and its services.

Rather, the other side of Evesham Connect’s value lies in giving township staff the ability to provide direct notifications to residents’ mobile devices on topics such as township news and future events.

Whether it’s a helpful reminder about this week’s upcoming leaf collection, a reminder of a big township event or even an unexpected announcement about a sudden road closure, Evesham Connect can be used to send residents a helpful alert that can be immediately viewed on their mobile device of choice.

As an added benefit, Evesham Connect also allows alert notifications to link to longer descriptions, where residents can get more information or even see attached photos and graphics.

“Reviews from residents have been amazing,” Mayor Veasy said. “Anyone who has downloaded Evesham Connect has had nothing but compliments for how easy it is to use and how convenient it is to receive news and notifications directly on their phone or tablet about all that’s happening in town.”

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McManimon, Scotland & Baumann, LLC

Revitalizing Municipalities through Redevelopment

Long known in New Jersey as a leader in Public Finance, McManimon, Scotland & Baumann, LLC has extensive experience in redeveloping underutilized properties in New Jersey. Through redevelopment, our attorneys have worked on:

- The conversion of a former Salvation Army property into The Asbury, a chic, 110-room hotel in Asbury Park;
- The development of a new Municipal Complex in Berkeley Heights located on the site of the existing municipal complex and constructed without disruption to municipal services;
- The revitalization of a vacant, environmentally contaminated site in Newton through construction of a new research and development facility, manufacturing facility and global headquarters for Thorlabs, Inc., a laser and photonics company;
- The environmental remediation of a former petroleum site and construction of a 356,000 sq. ft. “big box” retail center in Bayonne; and
- The restoration of bulkheads destroyed by Superstorm Sandy and the construction of a marina along the Great Egg Harbor Bay.

Our attorneys have extensive experience in redevelopment matters, including the creation of redevelopment agencies, the designation of areas in need of redevelopment and rehabilitation, assistance in the preparation of redevelopment plans and the selection of redevelopers, the negotiation of redevelopment agreements and financial (Payment-In-Lieu-Of-Tax) agreements, and issuance of redevelopment area bonds.

If you know of a property in your municipality that may benefit from redevelopment, please contact Matt Jessup (mjessup@msbnj.com).

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ROSELAND
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Local municipal television channels have come a long way since their portrayal in Wayne’s World. Plastic potted plants and silly content have given way to serious programs that inform, educate, and entertain the citizens they serve.

In addition to the importance of open government through meeting coverage, Public, Educational, and Government (PEG) channels carry various general interest programming for everyone from kids to seniors, with subjects that range from high school sports to cooking shows. Since many local newspapers have disappeared in recent years, PEG channels have become a major way local governments distribute information. This is particularly true in New Jersey because we sit between two major news markets. It’s often easier to find out what’s going on in downtown New York or Philadelphia then in your own hometown.

**COVID communications**

The real value of municipal channels has never been more evident than during the recent health crisis. The Jersey Access Group (JAG), the professional organization that represents the interest of municipal and community channels throughout the state, is proud of how our members have responded to the pandemic over these last two years. Even though many town halls were closed and station personnel were forced to work from home, PEG stations remained on air. Our members continued to offer important informational and entertaining programming to the citizens they serve with live meeting coverage and real-time updates of COVID-19 press coverage both locally and statewide.

Although early in the pandemic, many town halls were closed, the people’s business continued, and these stations were there to keep their residents informed by broadcasting virtual council and board meetings to maintain transparency in government. In addition, stations were called upon to provide important information about how to fight COVID-19. With community activities curtailed, many stations turned the time usually devoted to community bulletin board messages into a source of information on how to deal with the health crisis.

These included public service messages about proper hand washing techniques, social distancing requirements, and the need to wear masks to stop the spread of the disease. When testing locations were announced, PEG stations provided information about where and how to access testing. When vaccinations and booster shots became available, our member channels provided important information as to the location and availability of vaccines.

These same municipal channels were places viewers could go to watch Governor Murphy’s daily press briefings in their entirety, both live and re-broadcast at various times on our stations. These briefings provided important information about the fight against COVID-19 across the state.
School TV: Not just for kids
While it’s not surprising to find municipal stations carrying meetings, public service announcements, and the governor’s press conferences, there were many other ways PEG Channel helped the citizens in their communities. In the early days of the pandemic, with schools closed, and kids stuck at home, many stations created specialized programming to help parents entertain their kids while they worked from home.

Programs consisting of mayors reading books to kids, drawing and painting shows, and science-based programming filled time slots on many stations across the state to not only keep kids entertained but teach them as well. Music also helped children feel a sense of normalcy, and several stations created shows for kids with sing-along songs that both educated and entertained.

These programs were not limited to just kids. The senior population, who...
was most vulnerable during the pandemic, need to be reached as well. Stations created and aired senior exercise programs, Zumba Gold, Yoga, and other shows designed specifically for the senior population to help reduce the stress felt by many being trapped indoors during the pandemic. These same programs were shared with other stations around the state using the JAG sponsored cloud-based server, allowing smaller stations that might not have the manpower to create such shows to still air them for their viewing audience.

**Spiritual comfort**

The health crisis also affected the ability of people to attend religious services. While many municipal stations don’t normally carry religious programming, because of the pandemic, special arrangements were made with local churches, synagogues, and mosques to carry services to worshipers who were not allowed to attend them in person.

To many, the broadcast of their weekly worship services became a great comfort, especially to the senior population who found it easier to locate these on their local cable channel than try and navigate the internet.

**Larger audiences**

As things began to ease and the Governor allowed sports to continue, attendance was restricted so many of our PEG stations increased their coverage of both high school and recreational sports so friends and family could watch their teams compete even though they
couldn't attend the games in person.

Stations also became more creative and started airing these live on television and streaming them across social media platforms so they can be viewed by an even larger audience.

In a time that was decidedly not normal, JAG member stations provided programming to give their citizens a small sense of normalcy. Since parades and large social gatherings were not allowed during the pandemic, PEG stations throughout the state carried messages from mayors to commemorate Memorial Day, Independence Day, and 9/11 Remembrance Day.

Many PEG stations also covered virtual graduations to give families a chance to celebrate their high school graduates when traditional celebrations were not allowed because of the pandemic. These included messages created by the stations from graduates to their peers, words of encouragement from teachers and administrators, even traditional valedictory messages. In many towns, the stations also covered the socially distant awarding of diplomas live.

While we all have grown accustomed to living in a pandemic, in the beginning there were many technical challenges to overcome. Our stations had to learn how to go live from any location, broadcast a Zoom meeting live on air and share programming across multiple social media platforms. Many townships who used tools like Zoom to allow their citizens to participate in government meetings are now continuing these methods by televising hybrid meetings that integrate internet contributors into in-person meetings. This allows those who are still not comfortable with large gatherings to continue to participate as live meetings resume.

During the pandemic, many residents got used to this new way to participate in government meetings, and they want it to continue, finding it easier to watch these meetings on television from home and either calling in or interacting via the web. JAG, through the support of many industry professionals and vendors, have helped their members do just that.

To learn more about the Jersey Access Group, a NJLM Affiliate, please visit our website at www.jagonline.org or reach out to me directly at bduthaler@jagonline.org
Mayor John E. McCormac proudly calls Woodbridge Township “The Best Town Around.” Why? Because of the Township’s energetic, recognizable, and transparent communication vehicles. Recently, the Township’s website received a total redesign, making it easier than ever for residents to navigate the many resources and events the seventh-largest municipality in New Jersey offers. The website’s URL remains the same, www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us, but the content and accessibility received a major upgrade.
Easy navigation

The all new, modern webpage makes navigating everything Woodbridge so efficient. Features include the homepage breaking news announcement section, community calendar, and rotating headline banner with instant access to the top events in Woodbridge.

At the click of a button, visitors can download and fill-out the forms needed to apply for a building permit, view the recycling calendar, or digital copy of the Woodbridge News, watch TV-35 programs or “Go Green” with sustainable initiatives, sign-up for CodeRed alerts, and even email the Mayor or any of the Township staff.

Moving messages

As members of the New Jersey League of Municipalities, Woodbridge Township’s Communications Department emphasizes moving messages forward to stay in touch with our residents, constituents of our neighboring municipalities, and anyone looking to visit “The Best Town Around.” The Woodbridge Communications Department actively updates the website along with the Mayor’s Facebook Page (@MayorJohnMcCormac), Instagram (@MayorJohnEMcCormac) all while our local TV-35 (@TheWoodbridgeChannels on YouTube) station actively films every event in town to put on our new website and social media pages so if anyone misses an event, they can still feel like they are part of the action.

Creating accessible and easy-to-navigate platforms of the utmost importance for local government because this branch of government affects the everyday lives of our constituents. Local government should be easily reachable and recognizable with municipal branding. “The Best Town Around” is even better with the all new and modern look, but same Woodbridge Township branding our residents know and love.

One Umbrella

Woodbridge Township’s website, www.twp.woodbridge.nj.us, also offers easy-to-find information on all municipal departments and divisions including:

- Health & Human Services
- Senior Services
- Public Works
- Tax Office
- Woodbridge Police Department and emergency service agencies
- Planning & Development
- Recreation
- Municipal Clerk’s Office
- Municipal Court
- Links to Woodbridge Now app
- Greenable Woodbridge
- Enrollment form for CodeRed service
And more!

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Across our state, Get Covered New Jersey is allowing residents to lead healthier lives through access to quality, affordable health coverage. The creation of a New Jersey health insurance marketplace was grounded in the belief that health care is a right, not a privilege. Individuals with health coverage have greater access to the care that they need, such as routine health screenings and vital preventive services, which results in improved health outcomes and healthier, more resilient communities.

The State launched Get Covered New Jersey while the COVID-19 pandemic was bearing down on New Jersey and the nation. Establishing Get Covered New Jersey amidst the greatest health care crisis in over 100 years proved to be the right decision since the pandemic underscored the urgent need for all residents to have health coverage. The plans offered through the program include preventive services, prenatal and pediatric care, emergency services, and prescription drug coverage—among other benefits—and no one can be denied coverage due to a pre-existing condition.

A record high
This year more than 324,000 New Jerseyans signed up for health coverage following the end of the second open enrollment period as a state-based exchange. The number of residents signed up for coverage is a record high for New Jersey, with more consumers signed up for marketplace coverage than during any prior Open Enrollment Period since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. A key driver in the success of open enrollment this year was the increased financial assistance provided by the American Rescue Plan Act and our own state subsidy, the New Jersey Health Plan Savings, which enabled us to make health insurance more affordable and accessible to more residents.

Many New Jerseyans took advantage of the extra savings, with nine out of 10 enrollees qualifying for financial help and the majority who received assistance, paying $10 or less per month for a health plan. Due to the new and expanded financial help, 104,160 people are now receiving a health plan with a premium of $10 a month or less, compared to 29,475 people in 2021.

It is clear that the marketplace is fulfilling its intended purpose by providing consumers with the quality, affordable health insurance they deserve. While the standard Open Enrollment period has ended, our work to reach and cover more residents continues.

New Jerseyans who experience a qualifying life event, such as a pregnancy, marriage, loss of health coverage, relocation, or the birth or adoption of a child, were already able to apply for health coverage outside of the usual enrollment period—which typically runs from November 1 through January 31.

As part of the Murphy Administration’s ongoing efforts to advance health equity and affordability, we have expanded eligibility for enrollment outside of the standard enrollment period.
period through our new “Expanded Access” initiative, which allows residents at certain income levels to continue enrolling in free or nearly free health coverage through Get Covered New Jersey. The Expanded Access Special Enrollment Period allows qualifying consumers with an annual household income of up to 200% of the federal poverty level ($25,760 for an individual and $53,000 for a family of four) to enroll in a health plan throughout the year. Through the increased financial help available, eligible residents can access plans with low or no monthly premium.

**Leadership opportunity**

As leaders of your communities, you can help us build on the exchange’s success. I strongly encourage you to spread the word to your constituents who are currently uninsured and/or looking for comprehensive coverage that they can shop and compare health plans at GetCovered.NJ.gov.

Now is not the time to go without health insurance, and for those concerned about prices, they should speak to our available navigators within the local communities to provide free, unbiased consumer assistance in finding the right health plan within their budget and health needs. There are now 18 organizations with navigators that can provide help to residents by phone, virtually or in person.

Please encourage your residents to visit GetCovered.NJ.gov or call 1-833-677-1010 for more information on coverage available. The Customer Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Through the administration’s actions and investments, and in collaboration with the Legislature, New Jersey has made major strides in improving affordability and access to health care. We are very pleased with the work we have accomplished to build upon the monumental success of the Affordable Care Act by increasing access to coverage and care in our state. We remain committed to deepening the scope of this effort in the years ahead, working with partners to develop stronger, healthier communities throughout our state.

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**Who Should Get Covered?**

Get Covered New Jersey is ideal for those who don’t qualify for Medicare (65+) or Medicaid benefits, but still want a lower monthly premium; those who don’t have employee-sponsored health insurance, including independent contractors and gig workers; and anyone seeking comprehensive, quality, and affordable plans.
This year, the 107th Annual New Jersey State League of Municipalities Conference offers inspiration to build a better future in local government for the communities they serve. The nation’s largest municipal conference has over 100 years’ experience bringing together the community of local government officials and “Building for Tomorrow.” With an ever-changing landscape, attending the Annual League Conference each year is an important tool for building networks and becoming educated on the very latest case studies, approaches, and solutions.

As the heights of the pandemic disappear in the rearview mirror, municipalities are focused on a full recovery with an intent that has inspired this year’s conference theme, “Building a Better Tomorrow.” Local governments are diligently capturing once-in-a-generation federal funding while engaging their communities and their legislative representatives to make municipalities thrive. Hammering at issues such as infrastructure, affordable housing, and local rights of way, officials are hard at work with other towns, the state government, and the federal government.

EDUCATION
Each year, this annual three-day event offers educational sessions covering topics from the basics of today’s municipal challenges to more advanced approaches to technical issues. Formal educational sessions are produced by the League, its 21 Affiliated Associations, and the Exhibitors’ Learning Sessions.

Again this year, certain sessions will be carefully produced to include more advanced information to appeal to the experienced municipal official. The ability to accumulate Continuing Education Units (CEU) continues to be a top priority. The Annual League Conference is the most cost-effective method to achieve those credits required for professional recertification.

For 2022, we’ll be featuring thought leaders discussing new directions and options on a variety of topics, for example The Supreme Court’s Report on Municipal Courts, Cannabis, along with dozens of sessions regarding influential issues including Police Community Relations and Consolidations. A more complete list of topics will be posted on www.njlm.org/conference. Also, the full education session schedule will be available on the free and easy-to-use conference app starting in October. It will include useful search functions to help you customize your personal schedule.
EXHIBITS

In addition to the sessions, the Conference offers the largest municipal exhibition in the country, with exhibitors providing solutions and expertise on the latest products and services. The 150,000 square foot exhibit hall provides a unique, central setting for evaluating and selecting the services, partnerships, and products that can make municipal operations smooth and successful. Commercial vendors, government agencies, and non-profits are your information source in the 1,000-booth exhibit hall and are eager to meet face-to-face to discuss current challenges and assist with solutions. In order to deliver the best experience, the 2022 exhibit hall will include a third entrance, more cross aisles, lounges, and concession areas.

The list of over 350 exhibitors that are already confirmed is available now on www.njlm.org/exhibit. The full list of exhibitors will also be searchable using the conference app starting in October. Using the app, you can add “must see” exhibits to your personal schedule. Add a few hours into your schedule to visit the exhibit hall this year!

Together Is Better

First MCO is a full-service Managed Care Organization. After more than 40 years, we’ve learned that it’s everyone working together that gets the job done. Everyone working from the same page is even better. With our claims management platform WebMCO, we connect your managed care team, and their information, all in one place.

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EVENTS

The Annual Conference is also your opportunity to participate in setting the course of the League’s efforts for the year and other NJLM events. Voice your community’s concerns by participating in the adoption of this year’s Resolutions, the goals that guide the League policy throughout the year. Considered by the Resolutions Committee on Tuesday, they are adopted at the Annual Business Meeting on Thursday, where the new League leadership is also elected.

Catch up with your peers around the state at the Mayors’ Box Lunch and Executive Briefing as well as the Women in Municipal Government Networking and Awards Event on Wednesday, and on Thursday the League Delegates Luncheon is a highlight each year. All events feature speakers and the opportunity to catch up and network with local and state-level leadership.

There are many other events held by the League Affiliates, exhibitors, and related groups. These are opportunities to communicate with your peers from all over the Garden State about the subjects which resonate in your municipality each day. Peer-to-peer learning sets up your year ahead and is a valuable part of attending the Annual League Conference.

START PLANNING NOW

On the following pages you will find more information to help you begin setting your own League Conference schedule, coordinating with your colleagues, and Building for Tomorrow.

VENDORS: WANT TO REACH THE MUNICIPAL MARKET?

NJLM’s magazine puts your company name in the hands of local government decision makers across the state.

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Establish brand awareness in front of the magazine’s niche local government audience.
Tuesday, November 15
Exhibit Hall Open 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Choose from League & Affiliate sessions with topics including:
- Clean Communities
- Schools & Municipalities
- Pensions & Benefits
- Humor in Government
- Cultural Arts
- OPRA
- Mayors Wellness
Exhibitor Learning Sessions
NJLM Resolution Committee Meeting
Conference Orientation: Coffee with Leadership & Legislative Primer

Wednesday, November 16
Exhibit Hall open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Choose from League & Affiliate sessions with topics including:
- Affordable Housing
- Sustainable Jersey
- Legislative Leaders
- Urban Mayors
- Human & Civil Rights
Exhibitor Learning Sessions
Mayors’ Lunch Briefing
Annual Legislative Update
Women in Municipal Governments
Networking & Awards Event

Thursday, November 17
Exhibit Hall open 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Choose from League & Affiliate sessions with topics including:
- OPMA
- Public Contracts Law
- Transportation
- Tourism
- Labor Relations
- Environmental Issues
League Luncheon
NJLM Annual Business Meeting

2022 Conference App
The app will be re-created for 2022 and ready for download starting October 5.
Be ready to set up your schedule and arrange for education, networking, and exhibit visits.
Because the free app is all new for the 2022 Conference, it must be downloaded from your device’s store.

2022 Conference Preview
NJLM Conference • 107th Annual
Building for Tomorrow
November 15-17 • Atlantic City #njleague

AT A GLANCE
TIME/PLACE
The 107th Annual League Conference will be held in the Atlantic City Convention Center
Tuesday, Nov. 15 through Thursday, Nov. 17.

ACCOMODATIONS
On June 1, the online housing reservation site went live at www.njlm.org/ConferenceHousing,
and hotel reservation forms can be downloaded and used as well. The Housing Department reserves
blocks of rooms for assignment for League delegates using these official reservation methods.
AC Central Reservations is the only authorized housing service.
Transportation from official conference hotels to the Atlantic City Convention Center will be
provided by shuttle service.

EDUCATION & EXHIBITS
Your visit to the League conference is an opportunity to take part in the nation’s largest
gathering of municipal officials.
For a list of League and Affiliate conference sessions and a list of exhibitors, visit
www.njlm.org/conference. More information will also be provided in the October and
November issues of NJ Municipalities magazine, with details on the conference app.

REGISTRATION
Registration opens Aug. 1. More details will be posted online and mailed in late July.
www.njlm.org/ConferenceRegistration

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We accept checks, purchase orders, and credit card payments; with the exception of credit cards as the only method of payment 10/5-11/14.
5 Reasons to Attend

1. CEUs... earn credits for your municipal licenses & the NJLM Local Governing Leadership Program (LGLP).

2. Hot Topics... attend sessions on timely municipal topics by thought leaders from around the state and nation.

3. Exhibits... explore the exhibit hall, which hosts hundreds of companies meeting local government goods and service needs.

4. Network... meet with your peers from around the state.

5. Lead... help drive the actions of the League on behalf of local governments by participating in NJLM meetings and events.

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Contact: Kristin Lawrence | Director, Conference Business Development
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The following companies are eager to offer their knowledge, products, and services to assist municipal officials. Be sure to visit their booths. Visit www.njlm.org/exhibit for more information.
Following is a list of exhibitors at press time.
Contact Kristin Lawrence, Director, Conference Business Development, at klawrence@njlm.org or 609-695-3481, Ext. 125.
Gearing Up for Success

Attending the conference is easier than ever with a variety of information resources to help keep you in touch and up-to-date.

WEBSITE
Visit the League’s website, www.njlm.org/conference, to catch up on the latest developments for the 107th Annual League Conference.

SOCIAL NETWORKING
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter @NJ_League or #njleague for immediate notices on changes to the schedule of League educational sessions, shuttle bus changes, announcements about sold-out League events, and more!

DOWNLOAD THE APP
Download the 2022 Conference app on October 5 for an interactive exhibit floor plan and searchable list of exhibitors along with fully searchable session schedule, and up-to-the-minute event information. Create a personalized schedule before you arrive to maximize your conference experience!

Mini-2022 Conference
#njmini
June 15, 2022
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SESSION TOPICS:
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Questions?
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THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:
The American legislative process was designed to contain the public’s passions at any given moment by slowing things down. However, for a majority party with an aggressive agenda, the ability to fast-track legislation is a necessary tool that makes governing easier and subject to fewer obstacles, while also diminishing the opportunities for a bill’s opposition to organize.

In recent years, the “full speed ahead” approach has become the norm in Trenton, not the exception. For Democrats, who continue to control both houses of the legislature, there has been much to do, including responding to COVID-19. Demands by legislators, the Murphy administration, and key interest groups only added to the pressure on legislative leaders to accommodate as many wishes as possible—which meant more bills to consider.

Indeed, more bills were passed in each of the last two legislative sessions than at any time since the early 2000s. Trenton has grown accustomed to the fast pace, but the strain on everyone involved was clear and frustrating to many.

Now, things are changing. Since January, there has been a significant slowdown in the legislative process. New state Senate President Nicholas Scutari recently told a business audience that, “One of the things that we can do better in the future is doing less… and make sure that there is a full vetting process to things.”

The changes in the pace of legislative work are significant. Committees are meeting less frequently. Senate legislative committees that used to meet weekly are now being scheduled to meet every two weeks. Further, when they do meet, the list of bills on the agenda is generally shorter than in recent years.

The Assembly, operating on a different schedule, is working to limit its committees to one meeting before a full voting session, rather than the two meetings that were more common last session.

More committees are reviewing a single bill. Proposed legislation often overlaps the jurisdictions of multiple committees, but in the past, rarely did all those committees get to consider bills in a formal setting with public testimony. Now, there is a greater willingness to send a particular bill to multiple committees for consideration before going to a floor vote.

This return to “regular order” allows more legislators to review and publicly approve a bill prior to final passage, a significant factor given that the Democratic majorities are smaller than before and leadership needs widespread agreement.

For example, in the Assembly, legislation intended to lower prescription drug prices is expected to be heard by three committees—Financial Institutions, Health, and Appropriations. Before it reaches the floor, nearly 2/3 of the majority caucus will have signed off on the bill package, making it that much easier to ensure passage.

Since January, the pace of legislating has changed dramatically.

The Senate and Assembly are enforcing old rules and creating new ones. For several years, the requirement that no more than 30 bills be considered during a Senate voting session was routinely waived. This never caused serious concern. But over time, one long “board list” after another took its toll. Today, for the first time in years, the 30-bill rule is being enforced.

In the Assembly, the powerful Appropriations committee is meeting less frequently and will attempt to limit its agenda to no more than 11 bills, per its rules. In recent years, this requirement was often bypassed with upwards of 40 pieces of legislation considered at one hearing. Further, the Assembly has now empowered committee chairs to amend legislation and then keep it in the committee for future consideration. Previously, the approval of amendments had to be followed by a vote of the full committee on releasing the bill.

More time to work

The net effect of these changes is that the entire process of passing laws in New Jersey is going much slower than at any point in the past decade.

By slowing things down, legislative staff working in Trenton have more time to do their work, providing both the political and policy analysis for their respective members. Legislators are able to hear more from constituents and other
key stakeholders. With the new process, there is room for more give and take among those working in Trenton, thereby increasing both transparency and quality lawmaking.

Further, the Office of Legislative Services (OLS), the non-partisan technocratic division of the state legislature, is going through a significant period of transition, with both a new leadership team and the rapid hiring of new analysts to replace a large number of recent retirees. OLS is relied upon at every stage of the legislative process and the slower pace is allowing its staff to handle the work even when the office is shorthanded and often new to the job. Here are some of the reasons why this is happening now:

**Fallout from Election 2021** Trenton Democrats lost seven seats in November and there is no limit to the self-analyzing and hand-wringing that has taken place since then.

For many Democrats, the message from the election was about substance: What they were doing in Trenton wasn’t what the electorate was looking for.

For others, the message was about volume: Legislative Democrats passed so many good things (tax cuts, etc.) that the public hardly had a chance to learn about it all.

In a move that satisfies both camps, the party’s leadership has determined that moving slower would be the prescient strategy for now.

**New legislative districts** The legislative redistricting process earlier this year puts more than a quarter of all New Jersey municipalities into new districts. Incumbent legislators, as a general rule, fear this kind of change. Better to go slow and win their seat in 2023 than be too aggressive, such that their new constituents will not be supportive.

**A new Senate President** Though he’s been in the legislature since 2004, Senate President Scutari isn’t known yet for having a very broad agenda. He’s been a leader on cannabis, the judiciary, and consumer advocacy, but beyond that, his publicly stated views on other issues are quite limited. The slowdown benefits Scutari as it allows him to grow more comfortable in his new position, where he has a hand in everything that happens in Trenton.

**Just one more** When it comes to legislating, what we see in Trenton today is a much slower dance than in past sessions.

However, as the end of the fiscal year (June 30) approaches, there will be renewed pressures to “please pass this one bill” or “just one more amendment” from a host of voices, each with their own priorities. Senate President Scutari and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin will be pushed from multiple sides to speed things up. Only time will tell if they can withstand it and maintain the new pace of legislative work.

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Every day, in countless ways, people are making this a great place to live, work and play. We’re excited to see what you do every day. And we’re proud to support the New Jersey State League of Municipalities.

**Contact Robin Janas**

Vice President, Government Banking
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Creating a Civilian Complaint Review Board

**Q:** Is our municipality prohibited from creating a civilian complaint review board for our police department?

**A:** Any municipality may create a civilian complaint review board (CCRB) for their local police department. In fact, a recent New Jersey Supreme Court decision reinforced the authority for a municipality to do so. However, this same decision also curtailed the CCRB’s authority, limiting the investigative and subpoena powers with which such boards can be imbued. These limitations, some argue, restrict the overall effectiveness and quality of the CCRB.

For readers that are unfamiliar, a civilian complaint review board is an entity external to the police department’s internal affairs office. It typically consists of citizens in the community but from outside the department, appointed by the mayor or other government officials. Generally speaking, a CCRB is charged with investigating and reviewing complaints lodged against members of the municipal police force, and making recommendations as to the disciplinary action of law enforcement officers. In some jurisdictions outside of New Jersey, civilian complaint review boards are granted broad investigative authority that includes subpoena power, allowing CCRBs to require the production of documents and obtain testimony from law enforcement officers and others.

Civilian complaint review boards are not a new concept. They have been utilized by local governments across the country for many years. There has been a recent renewal in interest for creating CCRBs as scrutiny over police actions have intensified and calls for additional oversight have increased. Although the nature and scope of civilian complaint review boards can vary, generally speaking their purpose is to foster public trust, police accountability, and transparency in the review of police conduct.

While other jurisdictions allow it, civilian complaint review boards in New Jersey cannot currently be granted subpoena power. The authority was curtailed after the 2020 decision by the New Jersey Supreme Court in *Fraternal Order of Police, Newark Lodge No. 12 v. City of Newark*, (244 N.J. 75). The Court found that there is no inherent authority for the municipal governing body to delegate subpoena power to a non-legislative body of its creation. To the extent that a governing body itself has subpoena power, such power is inherent in and tied to the power to legislate.

The Court’s decision also found that CCRBs could not simultaneously review matters already under investigation by the police department’s internal affairs office. This in turn limits the scope of complaints that the civilian complaint review board can review. In short, if the internal affairs office is currently investigating a complaint, the CCRB would be prohibited from doing its own simultaneous investigation.

This isn’t to say, however, that the CCRB would be unable to perform its own investigation at the conclusion of the internal affairs office investigation. The CCRB would also logically be permitted to perform its own investigation prior to the opening of an internal affairs investigation, but the CCRB investigation would need to pause its investigation should the internal affairs office begins its own. This is because the Court has determined that the internal affairs investigation enjoys paramountcy.

At the League’s most recent Conference this past November, Conference Resolution 2021-10 was adopted that called on lawmakers to adopt legislation giving local municipalities the discretion to provide their CCRB with subpoena power. In the last legislation session, a bill (A-4656) that would have provided for this began to move its way through the legislative process. Unfortunately, the measure stalled after making its way out of committee. The measure was reintroduced this legislative session as A-1515 and has not been scheduled yet for a committee hearing.

As your municipality begins to think about the possibility of creating a civilian complaint review board, you should keep these limitations, along with the possible legislative changes, in mind. As always, the League is here as a resource to assist our members with any questions they may have.
WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:4-45, et al, a municipality is required to limit any increase in its levy to 2.0% and any increase in appropriations to 2 1/2% or the cost-of-living adjustment, whatever is less, over the prior year’s final appropriations subject to certain exceptions; and

WHEREAS, all local public entities have incurred an estimated $50 million in COVID related worker’s compensation claims and it is anticipated that these costs will continue to increase as a result of long-term COVID cases; and

WHEREAS, a 2021 New Jersey Department of Labor decision regarding workers compensation funding has generated increased costs to municipalities by over 10% in order to cover claims that were previously funded by the State pension system; and

WHEREAS, a recent amendment to the sexual molestation statute of limitations will increase total liability costs by an estimated amount of 6%; and

WHEREAS, the frequency of weather-related catastrophic claims and corresponding impacts are anticipated to increase property insurance costs by over 10% per year; and

WHEREAS, cyber liability events throughout the country have resulted in doubling premium costs in 2022 and such costs are expected to accelerate at a pace far greater than the rate of inflation; and

WHEREAS, these increasing costs, regulations, policy decisions and environmental impacts are occurring when many other items and costs in municipal budgets are also increasing at an inflationary rate.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Governing Body of the (NAME OF MUNICIPALITY) that N.J.S.A. 40A:4-45 be amended to provide that appropriations in the first three years after the effective date of (this amendment) for liability insurance, worker’s compensation insurance, cyber insurance, and property insurance be exempt from the Appropriation CAP and the Levy CAP.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution shall be sent to the New Jersey Legislative representatives for the (NAME OF MUNICIPALITY).
Providing broadband internet service through government means has not generally been a major concern of New Jersey local governments. This is largely because, although internet communication has burst onto the social and business scenes, the population density of New Jersey and the economic and financial benefits to the internet providers have resulted in a sense that this service is already broadly provided privately.

It has become increasingly apparent, however, that there are many areas, mostly in large suburban municipalities, counties, and rural areas in the state, that are significantly underserved by these private providers because the infrastructure costs outweigh the financial benefits to these providers. Regardless, these costs have increasingly become a factor even in areas where private service has been provided. So, the critical question is, knowing the economics do not seem to work for the private providers, should local governments step in to provide broadband for its residents even if the service does not support itself financially? The follow-up, and perhaps more impactful question is, does the public benefit outweigh the potential cost impact of proceeding with the governmental option?

In considering answers to these questions, I came across an article entitled, “Municipal Broadband: A Review of Rules, Requirements and Options” dated November 2014 and written by Sherry Lichtenberg, Ph.D., for the National Regulatory Research Institute and referenced as Report Number 14-11, that put these questions into a compelling perspective at the beginning with the statement:

“Like electricity a century ago, broadband is a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. It is enabling entire new industries and unlocking vast new possibilities for existing ones. It is changing how we educate children, deliver health care, manage energy, ensure public safety, engage government, and access and disseminate knowledge.”

Dr. Lichtenberg makes a compelling argument that local governments shouldn’t ignore the areas of their communities that are either underserved, not served at all or served at too high a cost by the private providers because it is otherwise not profitable to such providers. That said, local governments need to proceed cautiously if they chose to explore broadband since the costs that keep the private providers away may overwhelm the public providers that choose to provide broadband to these otherwise challenged areas in their community.
A practical example

Putting this in context for New Jersey, the City of Vineland is a practical example worth following. Vineland has chosen to explore the structural, financial, legal and operational issues and costs associated with providing broadband internet service. The city is, geographically, the largest municipality in our state, at over 68 square miles. While there are populated areas throughout the city that have access to internet services, there are several large pockets throughout that do not. In order to remedy that, the city has taken the leap and hired knowledgeable consultants to explore those areas of concern. It is a complex undertaking.

The city is also in a unique position as it operates the only publicly owned electric utility with an infrastructure that provides electric service to a large part of the city. Depending on how the city evaluates the required infrastructure needs and costs, the city’s existing electric utility infrastructure may serve a second role as the city’s broadband infrastructure, which could be a significant component financially to the viability of proceeding. Each local government will have to evaluate its own unique characteristics in evaluating the cost-benefit analysis.

The ultimate costs for delivery of such broadband internet services could be daunting for any public entity to pursue. If it were financially viable to service remote and underserved areas, it would be assumed that the private providers would have already done so. Nevertheless, the residents and businesses in these areas are no less valuable to the overall culture of a community. Furthermore, the exercise of evaluating a public alternative in a targeted area may also result in a less costly alternative than the cost incurred throughout the entire service area of the municipality being serviced by private providers. For instance, both Comcast and Verizon service most of Vineland already, including some of the remote areas. If proving to be viable, the leverage of an alternative cost-effective public service may result in a public/private arrangement that would be more cost effective throughout the entire city.

There are multiple structures that can be considered for any such service. As noted in the article referenced above, these can include:
1. Municipality owned and managed network.
3. Public private partnerships.
4. Open access (wholesale) networks.
Vineland is presumably studying and evaluating all of these options as to their structural, financial, operation and legal viability.

The ultimate costs for delivery of such broadband internet services could be daunting for any public entity to pursue.

Changes to law

The State of New Jersey previously enacted legislation (N.J.S.A. 40:9D-1 et seq.) that, on the surface, provides the authority to local governments to undertake broadband projects. The law provides multiple structural options similar to those mentioned above. It is, however, unclear, conflicting and potentially insufficient as worded to enable a local government to structure a transaction and provide sufficient contractual and financial security to proceed confidently. Whether these issues limit a local government’s ability to proceed to finance and implement a project remains to be seen. Changes to the law that remedy these potential issues have been provided to the Division of Local Government Services in the Department of Community Affairs to consider whether to submit to the Legislature.

For instance, the current law requires that any debt or other obligation of the local unit must be paid “solely” from the revenues derived from the service that is provided. It further requires that such debt be “revenue bonds.” It is likely or at least probable that the amount generated from these areas will be difficult to project forward as being sufficient to be self-liquidating. The law does not contain a provision addressing whether general taxes of the entire local government or general revenues of authorities or the local units with internal utilities can be used for preliminary planning and whether they would need to be reimbursed back to the general funds of the local unit from which they were advanced.

The law references that the obligations are to be issued pursuant to the Local Bond Law, despite the fact that debt authorized under that law is a general obligation payable from unlimited ad valorem taxes, and not from pledged revenues. The law further requires authorities and agencies to issue their debt pursuant to the Local Bond Law, notwithstanding that the latter only applies to counties and municipalities. In spite of the “requirement” that any debt or obligation be payable “solely” from the revenues of the broadband internet service, it authorizes a “local unit” to guarantee such debt but does not indicate whether a municipality or county could guarantee the debt of an authority or agency and makes no provision for how it would do that and what the implications of that are since such guarantee could ultimately be paid from taxes or revenues other than the broadband internet revenues. In sum, these are not insignificant inconsistencies, and they should be remedied.

As noted by Dr. Lichtenberg, provision of broadband to those that do not have it is foundational to a developed and economically and educationally advanced society. It is a worthy endeavor to explore by local government. The pros and cons are numerous but pretty straightforward and will ultimately need to be weighed seriously in the context of costs, liability and serious long term social, economic, educational, and governmental benefits to those who might not or are not being served by this critical service that will certainly be at the forefront of the next generation.
NJ Supreme Court Rules in Favor of Transparency

On March 7, 2022, the New Jersey Supreme Court sided with those in favor of transparency in Libertarians for Transparent Government v. Cumberland County and ruled that certain information about an individual’s employment constitutes a government record. To the extent a requestor seeks this information, and it is contained in a settlement agreement, the information (and by extension the agreement) must be produced in redacted form.

Facts

In October 2017, an incarcerated woman in Cumberland County filed suit against the county and several corrections officers, alleging she was forced to regularly submit to non-consensual sex acts. One of the corrections officers accused of “improper fraternization” was issued a preliminary notice of disciplinary action (PNDA) by the county and ultimately admitted to certain aspects of the alleged misconduct. The employee tendered his resignation, but when told by the county it still intended to pursue discipline, he agreed to cooperate with its investigation into the allegations. Ultimately, the county and corrections officer entered into a settlement agreement, resulting in a rescission of the preliminary notice of discipline and his retirement in good standing.

The plaintiff sought information about the underlying suit. It obtained the minutes of the Board of the Police and Firemen’s Retirement System (PFRS) during which the corrections officer’s application for retirement was discussed. PFRS allowed the corrections officer to retire in good standing, but reduced his service credit given that the at-issue misconduct extended over a period of time and directly touched on his employment.

Subsequently, the plaintiff submitted an Open Public Records Act (OPRA) request to the county for a copy of the PDNA, the settlement agreement, and certain information relating to the correction officer’s employment. The county declined to produce the settlement agreement and PNDA, citing the OPRA personnel exception as the basis for exemption. It did, however, provide the employment information requested, including a statement that the correction’s officer was “charged with a disciplinary infraction and was terminated.”

The plaintiff filed a complaint in Superior Court seeking access to the settlement pursuant to OPRA and the common law of access, based on its assertion that the county misrepresented the reason for separation. The trial court ordered production of a highly redacted copy of the settlement agreement, but did not rule on whether a common law right of access existed.

The Appellate Division overruled the trial court finding that a discipline settlement, as opposed to civil settlement, was exempt from disclosure because of OPRA's personnel exception. The New Jersey Supreme Court granted the application for review.

Decision

In general, OPRA requires public access to governmental records—documents which are made and maintained in the course of business by a public body. OPRA is designed to afford “ready access to government records” balanced against the clear statutory language mandating production of certain information. OPRA also allows the “public to play a role in ‘guarding against corruption and misconduct,’” a sentiment the court stressed given the misrepresentation made regarding the correction officer’s reason for separation.

Examining OPRA's personnel exemption, the court recognized that, generally, personnel records are not considered government records for the purposes of public inspection. However, even within the personnel exception a “person’s name, title, position, salary, payroll record, length of service, date of separation, the reason therefor, and the amount and type of the individual’s pension” are considered records subject to public review.

N.J.S.A. 47:1A-10.

According to the court, a plain reading of the statute required disclosure of the sought-after information contained in the settlement agreement. Date of separation and reason for separation, constituted government records subject to disclosure. Because part of the settlement contained information constituting a government record, it was “subject to disclosure after it is redacted.” To the extent the agreement included information outside the statutory carveouts, that information was appropriately exempt from disclosure. The court also noted that the production of an alternative document listing the reasons for separation is insufficient: “OPRA entitles [requestors] to press for actual government records.”

Bottom Line

The Court’s decision highlights OPRA’s goal to provide “transparency, accountability and candor” and prevention of presenting the public with incomplete or incorrect information. Relying on the personnel exception, without considering the document’s specific language, is inappropriate given the plain language of the law. Custodians of records must carefully review OPRA requests, the responsive documents, and the carve-outs included in any of the exceptions to OPRA.
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Is Hybrid Work Possible for NJ Municipalities?

It is no revelation that the worldwide pandemic has changed the nature of work in the world. We see this in all sorts of studies, commentaries (such as this one), and actions to determine what post-pandemic work and the demands by workers for alternative work schedules will look like.

Recent studies report nearly 75% of employees want flexible remote work options to be available. One overriding theme that seems to come from all of this discussion is that hybrid working is something government must consider.

For New Jersey’s municipalities, hybrid work discussions have been numerous and varied. As with anything new, establishing standards is difficult and oftentimes confusing. However, we all learned during the height of the pandemic that remote working for New Jersey municipal workers is possible—and local government employees want it to continue.

Adding to the complexity of determining how to responsibly manage hybrid work, New Jersey municipalities are faced with an ever-growing lack of qualified employees. Clearly this is not limited to our industry; it is throughout the United States. Many of us have experienced the difficulty of hiring professional staff. This was pointed out in a recent League article, “Where Have All the CFOs Gone?” (in the January and February issues) about the difficulties of hiring certified financial officers. In that article, author Joseph Monzo, Principal, JPMonzo Municipal Consulting, points out the changing environment and difficult recruitment process for qualified CFOs. Simply put, the demand for hybrid work is growing and those towns willing to accommodate hybrid work find that they are able to retain and recruit qualified professional employees.

Delivering our mission

To this point, in December 2021, the United States Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in its report, “Status Of Telework In The Federal Government, Report to Congress” Director Kiran Ahuja, writes “This [the pandemic] experience makes clear that, when implemented correctly telework, can help us deliver our mission. As we look in the future, OPM is encouraging agencies to strategically leveraged workplace flexibilities such as telework to attract, recruit, and retain the best possible workforce, as well as leverage telework as a way to ensure greater resiliency and emergency preparedness through the Federal government. Through measurable progress towards enhanced telework eligibility and participation, and the data reporting practices detailed in the report, agencies are better positioned to revisit how they were operating before the pandemic began and leveraged lessons learned to integrate telework into their strategic workforce plans.”

Many times, solutions to a variety of problems trickle down from the federal government to the state government and then to municipal government. While many of us in local government like to think that we are flexible enough to come up with solutions on our own—and we do—we look to those forms of governments for guidance on how best to approach the problem in government management. This is particularly true in New Jersey where oversight by the State is clear. While many mayors, governing bodies, and administrators throughout the state are working on this issue, we do have a model provided by the New Jersey Civil Service Commission (CSC) that I believe can help municipal administrations with determining how best to provide a hybrid work model.

On April 6, 2022, Chairperson Deidre L. Webster Cobb, issued Model Telework Pilot Program, State Executive Branch Employees. While this is obviously designed for a certain sector of State employment, it does provide us, as municipal officials, guidance on how we can put into place a hybrid work schedule. I strongly recommend you get a copy of CSC Docket # 2022-2243, which can be found at www.njlm.org/TeleworkPilot.

In the descriptions of the pilot program, there are several key points and guidance on implementation that are critical. Most important is the fact that not all work is suitable for telework. There needs to be a thorough assessment of what work for your municipality is possible.
Critical planning

The discussion of hybrid work will be continuing for many months to come. For the sake of local government functions, it is critical for operations and for the recruitment of qualified employees—especially in the specialty fields. Demands by the tax-paying public are always paramount, and we must find ways to provide services while balancing the demand of the new work conditions for those who provide those services. We, as local government officials, need to address this matter in the coming year.

The NJ State League of Municipalities recognizes the importance of this subject and is currently developing a program to allow more information and discussion by local officials. I am certain much more discussion and information will be coming out over the next several months.

To discuss about the NJLM Labor Advisory Service, email Matt@njcs.us

Telework Pointers

While I will not go into all the points made in Docket # 2022-2243, here are some important points:

- No more than 2 days per week for telework.
- Employees should have an application process and managers should determine if the work is eligible.
- Eligibility process should be clearly defined.
- Training is important to be provided for both management and employee on how the telework is conducted.
- Timekeeping and work performed must be kept along with any records generated.
- Security of information is key. Equipment should be provided that ensures security both of documents and cyber security purposes.
- The process for eligibility should be done in consultation with the relevant unions as plans are being developed.
The legislature and the administration must earnestly reengage on affordable housing policy. The first step being to reinstitute the Council on Affordable Housing and remove these matters from the courts. This has never been more necessary as the deadline for a new round of obligations draws near. –FM

A-3493
Parking in Electric Vehicle Charging Locations
Status: Referred to the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee

A-3493 would prohibit an individual from parking in an electric vehicle charging location if the vehicle is a non-electric vehicle. The location must be clearly marked:

1) As an electric vehicle charging location.
2) As designated for electric vehicle charging only.
3) To indicate that violators are subject to a penalty.

The bill defines “electric vehicle charging location” as a publicly accessible parking space(s), with visible signage designating that the parking space or spaces are available for use by the public for charging plug-in electric vehicles. The League supports this permissive legislation. –AL

A-1100/S-995
Removing abandoned lines from poles and other structures
Status: A-1100 has been favorably reported out of the Assembly Telecommunications and Utilities Committee and is in second reading in the Assembly. S-995 has been referred to the Senate Economic Growth Committee.

The right-of-way is a limited public asset that must be carefully managed and preserved. As trustees of this asset, municipal governments actively manage the rights-of-way to protect residents’ safety, preserve the character of their community, and maintain their availability for current and future uses. Local officials require certain tools in order effectively and efficiently fulfill these duties and A-1100/S-995 provides these tools. This bill requires the removal of above-ground lines that have been abandoned for at least 12 months or have been permanently put out of service.

As more and more utilities make use of the right-of-way it is critically important that unused or abandoned lines are removed to make way for future use. A-1100/S-995 provides a mechanism to assist municipal officials with effectively and efficiently fulfilling their duties as trustees of the right-of-way. –FM
S-861
Christmas Tree Burning

Status: Referred to Senate Environment and Energy Committee.

S-861 allows a municipality to conduct an annual event for the open burning of Christmas trees. Currently, the open burning of refuse materials, including Christmas trees, is prohibited under NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regulations. While generally prohibited, DEP has, although sporadically and inconsistently, issued variance permits allowing municipalities to host community events center on bonfires burning Christmas trees. These events help local economies and provide a fundraising opportunity for local volunteer fire departments.

The annual burning of Christmas trees provided for in S-861 allows municipalities to avoid needing to petition DEP for a variance and provides stability going forward, allowing these beneficial events to continue. –FM

Prepare Your Conference Resolutions

The League will be accepting Conference Resolutions once again this fall. The following are guidelines for submissions.

1. The Committee will consider resolutions only from officials who are currently in municipal office. Resolutions must be general in nature and of demonstrable relation to municipal government interests.

2. A summary of the proposed resolution is to be sent to the League for review via fax, email, or regular mail by the first Friday in October (October 7, 2022).

3. The full text of all resolutions submitted by member officials must be received in the League office by the third Friday in October (October 21, 2022). Every resolution must have a sponsor and co-sponsor. The sponsor or co-sponsor of the resolution must attend the meeting of the Resolutions Committee during the Conference week to speak on his or her proposal and to answer any questions of the committee members. The name and address of the sponsor and/or co-sponsor must appear on all resolutions.

If a resolution is recommended as part of the Resolutions Committee Report at the Annual Business Meeting, the sponsor or co-sponsor must also be present to answer questions raised by the delegates.

4. The Resolutions Committee does not draft resolutions, but they can amend resolutions presented to them.

5. Delegates may request copies of all the resolutions as received in the League office for the Resolutions Committee.

6. Any resolution which contains a reference to the Revised Statutes or to any other material, must have attached to it a copy of the material referred to.

7. The only resolutions to be considered at the Annual Business Meeting will be those which have been considered, endorsed, and presented by the Resolutions Committee to delegates.

For more information, please contact Deputy Director Lori Buckelew at lbuckelew@njlm.org.
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NJLM Past President and Clinton Town Mayor Janice Kovach has stepped in front of the camera for a new show, My Town with Janice Kovach on RVN Television, a Mount Laurel-based broadcast media firm.

Season One of Mayor Kovach’s show began in March and featured municipal experts and leaders including Lambertville Mayor Andrew Nowick, Bethlehem Mayor Paul Muir, Dunellen Mayor Jason Cilento, High Bridge Mayor Michele Lee, Cranford Mayor Kathleen Prunty, and Phillipsburg Mayor Todd Tersigni.

Following, Mayor Kovach provides insights into the program.

Q What is the concept of your show?

This is actually the brain child of the owner of RVN Television, Keith Reynolds. He was looking for a way that residents in communities could find out what is going on and give mayors a platform to share that information. RVN and Keith have been extremely supportive and once we talked through the format, we were recording within a week.

I open every show with the usual questions that we get: why are my taxes going up, who made the decision to build a warehouse in my backyard, why didn’t my road get paved or my garbage picked up? As much as we think we are putting out information as elected officials, it is not always getting to the residents.

Q What do you hope to achieve?

My goal is to provide a platform for mayors as well as elected officials to share initiatives in their communities but also give the residents an opportunity to find out what is happening. So many times we are inundated with information that we miss something important.

Obviously I have at least 563 different shows that I can host (we do not lack for potential guests). Ultimately, I hope that we can be the go-to for residents and elected officials.

Q What do you hope local officials will take away?

The importance of sharing information with their residents. Our conversation is about highlighting the amazing communities of this state.

Q There are so many communities in the Garden State, what common aspects do you plan to explore?

Common aspect of all the shows will be communication. We will touch on the impacts of social media and a 24-hour news cycle. And we will try to answer the question: How do we most effectively communicate with our residents?

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