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Q&A with the 2017 Gubernatorial Candidates
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Election 2017: Navigational Opportunities

This year New Jersey voters have an important opportunity to vote for all their State legislators and the governor. That makes for a very complicated year for local government as we navigate the fiscal and political tensions. This dynamic was demonstrated with the State budget delayed until July 4th, which in turn delayed education aid numbers until later in July and resulted in some delayed property tax bills. Governing by crisis is never helpful when local government is required to adhere to best practices, make payments on time, comply with burdensome mandates, and fund priorities as determined by the administration, legislature, and courts.

As you speak with the candidates this election season ask them if they understand and empathize with the requirements imposed on local government.

Of particular importance, ask all the candidates you speak with if they understand the compulsory burdens imposed on local governments and how those drive property taxes. For example, when police and fire labor negotiations go to an arbitrator who can then impose salary increases higher than the property tax levy cap, do the candidates know and appreciate how those increases are funded? Take time to explain to candidates how they can help control the property tax burden in New Jersey by tying arbitration awards to the property tax cap; returning funds to municipalities that the State collects on their behalf, like energy taxes; fix the open records law that encourages speculative lawsuits and awards unlimited attorney fees; and have the Legislature address the State's affordable housing needs instead of the expensive and inconsistent court process.

If the candidates you speak with are serious about solving New Jersey's property tax burden, rather than using it as a scapegoat, make sure they understand how their action or inaction will in large part either contribute to the solution or make that burden heavier to bear.

Editor's Note: As this issue goes to press Florida, Texas, and Louisiana are recovering from Hurricanes Irma and Harvey. New Jersey knows all too well the impacts and immediately offered assistance. New Jerseyans, Floridians, Texans, and Louisianans are all Americans and our hearts go out to them.

Michael Darcy
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The rise of various alternative forms of consumption and travel that go under the collective title of the Sharing Economy are impacting how people live and work in our communities. The sharing economy is broadly defined as being based around online transactions. From ordering clothing online from Amazon or summoning a ride to the shopping mall from Uber to booking a room for a vacation on AirBNB, finding a good restaurant on Yelp, and using the Transit App to find out when the next bus will arrive, we are relying more and more on the use of Internet enabled technologies to provide us with the basic needs for our busy lives.

A new service model

Thus, we have significant components of economic activity that are not tied to any local or physical locations. For the last 80 years, people purchased goods for the most part from their local stores and traveled to and from these locations to obtain these goods in their own private automobiles or by mass transit or walking. They generally received information via newspapers, mail, or on broadcast media services such as radio or television, and then they purchased goods or obtained services from local providers. The advent of mobile data devices is radically altering how business, local governments, public agencies, and residents interact and obtain services.

Today, a whole range of economic and social activity relies upon the use of online information for planning, booking, ordering, and delivery. These changes are altering a large segment of our consumption basket of goods as well as putting additional demands for the release of data from municipal organizations.

Will we see the decline of local retailing in the next decade? It appears that the cracks are already appearing in the existing economics of retail—with many brick and mortar stores under significant pressure from online competitors. The range and scope of goods that are available for purchase online continues to expand—with enhanced data services now allowing movie streaming to replace local video stores. Tantalizing snippets of information appear in the press and from the companies about how widespread the use of these new services have become (see the sidebar information from Uber regarding the most popular destinations for Uber rides at the Jersey Shore).

Examining regulation

These changes present challenges for municipal and state governments in terms of regulation and taxation of these new
activities. Services like AirBNB, Uber, Lyft, Zipcar, Online shopping and bike-share systems are providing opportunity for new economic activities to exist in our towns and are also making some of our regulations and land use rules out of step with the modern economy. If towns want to retain their economic vitality, towns must seriously consider how these new players will impact their communities and existing regulation. It is also important to consider the needs of local residents, commuters, and visitors as to their expectations about how they want to live or recreate.

The advent of mobile data devices is radically altering how business, local governments, public agencies, and residents interact and obtain services.”

• Does a shore town help or hurt its overall economic vitality by extensively regulating AirBNB?
• Does a bedroom community in North Jersey benefit from expanded car-sharing or bikesharing opportunities near its commuter rail station?

The Sharing Economy

“The advent of mobile data devices is radically altering how business, local governments, public agencies, and residents interact and obtain services.”
The Sharing Economy

How should urban areas adapt to the flood of local freight deliveries generated by online shopping?

The answers to these questions are not simple or one dimensional—municipalities must sift through the competing local interests and the broader changes in economic activity and decide which course of action or set of regulations will produce the best outcomes for their community.

In many cases, regulated industries and rules may have existed for decades, unchallenged by any competition or alternative services. These existing providers may have been sheltered from the true economic realities of a competitive market and may attempt to retain their protections from outside competition through political advocacy and local legislation. These actions may be effective in constraining online activity in the short run—but in the long haul may produce unexpected impacts on our communities.

Case in Point

Taxi and livery services provide us with an interesting case to consider. Historically, many municipalities have a regulated taxi and livery market that may have rules established decades earlier. For instance, one New Jersey town has regulations on taxi cab operations that has capped the number of taxi and livery vehicles at 35 and has not issued a new taxi or livery license since the early 2000’s.

New providers such as Uber or Lyft consider these limited local regulations to be burdensome and inconsistent with their existing business models. Uber generally looks to regional or state regulations or even openly skirts existing regulatory structures in its quest for new markets. In many states this has resulted in attempts to move regulation and controls from the local government to the state government. These changes in regulatory structures and economic realities can quickly alter the viability of long standing protected industries.

It is also useful to consider what local activities might be subject to new markets and services and what new services might grow in regions.

Councilman Peters is Professor of Finance and Data Analytics at The College of Staten Island.

Where to?

Seaside destinations have benefitted from the sharing economy in the form of rides to favorite hotspots all summer long. According to Uber.com, here are riders’ top Jersey Shore destinations.

Atlantic City
• Borgata Hotel & Casino

Asbury Park
• Porta Pizza
• Stone Pony
• Watermark

Avalon
• Princeton Bar & Grill

Belmar
• Bar A
• D’Jais Bar & Grill

Manasquan
• Leggett’s Sand Bar
• Osprey Hotel / Nightclub

Margate City
• Maynards
• Steve and Cookie’s by the Bay
• Tomatoes

North Wildwood
• Keenan’s North Wildwood

Point Pleasant Beach
• Jack Baker’s Wharf
• Jenkinson’s Board Walk
• Martell’s Tiki Bar
Show off your City! And win a League publication!

Send us photos of your municipality! Help us showcase our beautiful state by sending photos of your tourist attractions, downtown areas, economic development initiatives, parks, city halls and new projects.

All entries will be posted on the League’s Facebook page, website and some featured in the April issue of NJ Municipalities, and possibly other issues. A winner will be chosen and receives a free League publication of their choice!

Photos should be high resolution jpegs, at least 1MB in size. Please provide photo credit if necessary.

Photos can be submitted to aspiezio@njslom.org, or mailed on CD or flash drive to 222 West State Street, Trenton, NJ 08608.

Deadline to submit is February 1.

Entry details: Unfortunately stockphotos and images that are too low resolution will not be considered. By submitting a photo you are agreeing that you own the rights to the photo and that NJLM has permission to use the photo in NJ Municipalities, on NJLM’s social media and website, and on other printed materials. A winner will be chosen at random on February 15. Please include your Facebook profile name and we will tag your photo on Facebook!
Building Smarter Cities

What’s next? How can communities be better, stronger, and smarter? Those are the never-ending questions local officials ask of themselves. Reaching answers for those questions requires a blend of historian, evaluator, and future forecaster.

This month, NJ Municipalities focuses on Smart Cities. This growing effort is, according to the Smart Cities Council, a movement to advance your city’s livability, workability, and sustainability. Often that includes the adoption of new technological movements that cross into the everyday world, such as the sharing economy of ridesharing, transient space marketplaces, and other cyber services that have brought downtown to the palm of citizen’s hands.

But it’s not just cool apps that make the Smart City movement so compelling. In the five years since Superstorm Sandy ravaged New Jersey, federal, state, and local organizations have made efforts to shore up the shore by creating new methods of preventing future flooding, predicting weather outcomes, and building resilience strategies.

The Department of Community Affairs along with the University of Notre Dame and State University of New York at Buffalo are working together to empower local officials to become their own Geographic Information System (GIS) experts to assess hazards and take preemptive action before storms. The bells and whistles of the new world of tech have practical applications that may save property, money, and most important: lives.

The topic of Smart Cities is also a focus at the 102nd Annual League Conference, joining a wide array of sessions that will help municipal officials answer the question: What’s next? Read up on the basics of sessions and events in our Session Preview, also in this issue. Look for the icon at the end of stories throughout the issue for connections from features to related sessions slated to run at the Conference, helping leaders in their plans for Realizing Tomorrow’s Potential!

Where’s the Beef?

While we take the clear-wrapped meats in the local supermarket for granted now, in 1971, NJ Municipalities Magazine reported that there was a League Committee to Study the Clear Packaging of Meats.

Summer Theater

Providing entertainment for the area during the summer months, the Parsippany Troy Hills Parks & Recreation Department community theatre group’s “Shut-In Theatre” was featured in the October 1972 issue of NJ Municipalities magazine. The group put on weekly performances at nursing homes and hospitals and even to the homes of individual shut-ins, complete with a guitar accompanist for places without an available piano.

Community Night

Using a “Parents Night” theme, the Township of Cranford developed a “Community Night” which was featured in the January 1977 issue of NJ Municipalities magazine. Noted Township Administrator Sidney H. Stone, “Since we are proud of our organization, our employees, and the job we do for our citizens, this ‘Community Night’ concept seemed an excellent way to explain local government to our residents.”
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