INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The ABCs of Being a Newly Elected Official
Our Town: Rio Rancho
TABLE OF CONTENTS

The ABCs of Being a Newly Elected Official.................. 4
Our Town - Rio Rancho ................. 8
Legal Lessons: Pay Attention - The Final Lesson.............. 12
Census: Happy New Year ............. 14
Run the World: Women in Leadership ................. 15
NMML Classifieds.................. 18

Front Cover and Our Town photos provided by the City of Rio Rancho

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THE NEW MEXICO MUNICIPAL LEAGUE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ADOPTED THE FOLLOWING PRIORITIES FOR THE LEAGUE’S ACTION PROGRAM DURING THE 2020 LEGISLATIVE SESSION.

**TAXATION & REVENUE**

**Gross Receipts Tax Adjustment Notification to Local Governments.** (Resolution 2019-28). Seeks legislation that amends Section 7-1-6.15 to provide for notification if a gross receipts tax adjustment exceeds 20% of the annual monthly distribution over a 36 month period.

**PERA.** (Resolution 2019-29). Supports legislation that will ensure that local governments will share proportionally in solvency solutions that increase the soundness of the municipal general, municipal police and municipal fire Divisions of the PERA Fund.


**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**EMS Funding.** (Resolution 2019-31). Supports an appropriation by the New Mexico State Legislature to the State Fire Marshal to conduct a statewide EMS assessment, in coordination with Department of Health EMS Bureau, using monies currently reverted from the Fire Protection Fund, to the State General Fund.

**Law Enforcement Protection Fund.** (Resolution 2019-35). Supports legislation to distribute all remaining balances in the fund to the appropriate Law Enforcement Agencies.

**Enhancing Safety in Public Schools.** (Resolution 2019-36). Proposes to:
- amend the PERA conditions for retirement to allow retired law enforcement to be employed in public schools without penalty to their PERA benefits;
- fund technology to enhance school safety;
- amend statutes regulating possession of firearms to address Extreme Risk Protection Orders (Red Flag Laws) for individuals in crisis and to limit their access to firearms, and their ability to obtain them;
- further increase penalties regarding school shooting threats to a felony;
- support new bullying legislation to include monitoring and follow-up on threats made by social media; and
- provide training through a School Safety Omnibus bill to respond to Active Shooters.

**Fire Fund.** (Resolution 2019-40). Supports legislation that will ensure that funding is appropriated in the best interest of the Fire Protection Fund and its beneficiaries.

**LIBRARY**

**State Grants for Libraries.** (Resolution 2019-6). Endorses the passage of legislation to increase the appropriation to the library division of the Cultural Affairs Department to provide grants-in-aid for local library services and operations.


**FEES & FUNDS**

**Court Automation Fee.** (Resolution 2019-9). Supports increasing the Municipal Court Automation Fee from $6 to $10, matching the $10 fee currently collected in Magistrate and Metropolitan Courts.

**State Aviation Fund.** (Resolution 2019-15). Supports removal of the Sunset provision and making the State Aviation funding permanent.
A. Attitude. The right attitude is essential. You may think that this is your opportunity to “change the world” or at least your little part of it. Municipal government is a complicated business. Before embarking on a crusade of change, take the opportunity to listen and to learn about the business of governing from those who have governed and also from those who are governed.

B. Budget. The budget is much more than dollars and cents. It is the most important policy document you will ever put together. Municipalities must have a budget that is balanced, yet one that provides an appropriate level of services to its inhabitants. Care must be taken to obtain accurate predictions of municipal revenue and to limit spending to an amount that can be covered by anticipated revenues and reserved savings.

C. Conflicts of Interest. As a member of the governing body, you are prohibited from taking an official act (such as voting) for the primary purpose of directly enhancing your financial interest. An elected official should treat the office as a public trust. Full disclosure of real or potential conflicts of interest should be the guiding principle.
D. Debt. A debt is an obligation resulting from borrowing money or entering into contracts for the purchase of goods and services. Debts of governments may also include bonds. No individual elected official; may bind the municipality; it is the collective decision of the governing body that is required to bind the municipality financially.

E. Employees. Employees are your most precious asset. Treat your employees with care and respect. Public employees are a rare breed of individual that is willing to sacrifice the larger salaries of private life for the feeling that they have done something to promote the public good. Employees are there to make the municipality a better place to live and work, a goal that should be shared with everyone in the public service.

F. Freedom of Information. The activities of public employees and elected officials are the public’s business. The Inspection of Public Records Act provides the vehicle for making the actions of public official open to public inspection. You should be mindful that the actions you take are and should be open to the public and that the municipality should strictly comply with the procedures provided for to allow inspection and copying of public records.

G. Gifts. The Gift Act prohibits a state officer, employee or candidate for state office from accepting a gift with a value in excess of $250. Although the Gift Act applies to state officers, employees and candidates for state office it is a good guideline for municipal officers and employees to follow. Gifts to public officials always arouse suspicions and are best avoided altogether.

H. Home Rule. Home rule municipalities are those that have undertaken the process for adopting a local charter. Home rule municipalities are typically larger, and they have the advantage of being able to legislate and act on all matters unless the legislature has expressly prohibited the municipality from acting in the given subject matter.

I. Internet. A wonderful tool that places almost infinite information at your fingertips, including the New Mexico Municipal League website at www.nmml.org. Use the Internet as a starting point for your research but always rely on primary sources over those found online.

J. Judge. The municipal judge is also a partner in the governing of the municipality. The judge is responsible for hearing criminal cases involving the violation of municipal ordinances. Separation of the judicial functions from the executive and legislative branches is the cornerstone of government structure in the United States and New Mexico. Make the judge feel like they are a member of the team while at the same time respecting their boundaries.

K. Kickbacks. A kickback is the illegal act of receiving something of value in exchange for providing help (or a vote) in a secret and dishonest business deal. Kickbacks are one of the most common forms of government corruption and are easily avoided; just say no.

L. Liability. Elected officials will generally not be held liable for acts or omissions that are outside the scope of your duties as an elected official. Action that you take that are within the scope of your duties might give rise to liability of the municipality as you are a duly elected/appointed representative of the municipality. Liability is limited, however, under the Tort Claims Act.

M. Meetings. Meetings are the vehicle through which the elected officials pronounce the policy objectives of the municipality and through which municipal actions are initiated. Meetings of the governing body are required to be open to the public

Continued on page 6
under the Open Meetings Act, and can only be closed for a limited number of reasons and only after the proper procedure has been invoked.

N. Nepotism. It is the act of an elected official to employ as clerk, deputy or assistant, any person related by within the third degree to the person giving such employment, whose compensation is to be paid out of public funds. There are exceptions to this general rule and sometimes it is unavoidable in very small towns, but in general, the hiring of relatives of elected officials should be avoided or at least strictly scrutinized.

O. Open. Meetings of the governing body and the court must be open to the public. The open and transparent exercise of government functions is essential to maintaining the trust and legitimacy of government activities.

P. Personnel. Personnel actions fall primarily to the executive branch for action. The supervision and direction of personnel activities is outside the scope of duties of governing body members, and if the municipality employs a manager or administrator, are beyond the authority of the mayor as well. There are some actions that require approval of the governing body members, but these are the extraordinary matters. Daily personnel actions should be left to the executive branch, through a manager or other department directors to implement.

Q. Quorum. A majority of the members of the governing body (including the mayor) is a quorum. A quorum of the governing body, convened in an open meeting (with a few exceptions) is required to conduct business.

R. Respect. Respect for the fellow members of the governing body, respect for the citizens whom you serve and respect for yourself are the ingredients for a highly successful career as an elected official. Respect is recognizing value from different opinions and following through with commitments.

S. Service. Your service and sacrifice for choosing to become an elected official are appreciated for more than you might imagine. It takes a special individual to make room in their life for the important job of governance. It is a complex, sometimes personal and controversial. Whether it is said directly to you or not, let it be known that the citizens of your community thank you for your service and sacrifice to the better good.

T. Tort Claims Act. The Tort Claims Act is the statute that deals with the notion of sovereign immunity. In New Mexico, the government (including local governments and their elected officials) enjoy sovereign immunity (meaning they cannot be sued or held responsible) for acts that injure others, except as that immunity is waived by the Tort Claims Act. The Tort Claims Act sets forth very specific areas where sovereign immunity has been waived meaning the government and its officials may be sued and held liable. The Tort Claims Act also sets limits on the amount of money that individuals may recover for the bad or negligent acts of government officials.

U. Unilateral. Unilateral acts are those actions undertaken by a single individual. You are a member of a team, a team that is required to act collectively. Elected officials are rarely empowered to act unilaterally. Seek out your team and act collectively.
V. Vote: As an elected official, you speak to the public by your vote. Be prepared to cast a vote on every agenda item, unless you have some sort of conflict of interest or other reason you cannot legitimately vote or participate. Choosing not to vote because the matter is controversial is not responsible. You were placed in this important position of trust to tackle the tough situation and to vote for the betterment of the community.

W. Wisdom: With your wisdom, anything is possible.

X. “Xcellence” Strive every day to be your very best. Excellent cities begin with excellent leaders. The citizens who elected you to office depend on your ability to be your very best.

Y. Yesterday Yesterday is history, but tomorrow is a mystery. Look always forward for the future has yet to be written and you can be the author.

Z. Zoning. The ability for a municipality to establish zones throughout and to regulate the look, construction and use of the land in those particular districts. Zoning is a powerful tool but it is also one that can be abused. Zoning authority must be exercised judiciously and consistently, in doing so, property values will increase and the overall appearance of your municipality will be enhanced.

There you have it. Keep these ABCs hand and refer to them often. Remember, you occupy a great position of trust and authority. The citizens of your community are looking to you to provide the leadership to lead the community into the future. Remember also that the League is just a phone call or e-mail away.
As 2020 begins, I find myself reflecting on the City of Rio Rancho’s accomplishments. During the past year, Phase 1 of Southern Boulevard’s reconstruction was underway and the project will be completed by the end of 2019. Thanks to extensive planning, communication, and collaboration with community stakeholders, this main business corridor area was not adversely impacted while the much-needed work was in progress. At my urging, and with City Council support, this year we will utilize budget savings to make substantial improvements on Southern Boulevard between Unser and Rainbow.

Over the past year, we have been busy putting voter-approved road bond dollars to good use. Improvements to Montreal Loop, Meadowlark Lane, Rockaway Boulevard, and Abrazo Road were completed. Improvements to Sundt Road are currently underway with Country Club Drive to follow in the near future. Other major road projects completed, or in progress, include improving a portion of Unser Boulevard and Northern Boulevard, reconstructing Meadows Boulevard, and extending Lincoln Avenue from Paseo del Volcan.

In addition to significant improvements to Rio Rancho’s most heavily-traveled roads, neighborhood streets have received unprecedented levels of repair. More than 45 miles of crack patching has been completed between 2017 and 2019. This work will
continue with more neighborhood streets receiving attention in 2020.

If it seems as if we have completed a lot of road work, you would be correct, and there’s much more to come! Our residents have consistently said road improvements are a priority for them, and our local government is listening. In addition to roads, we are making great progress in other areas.

Public safety is a cornerstone to Rio Rancho’s national ranking as New Mexico’s best place to live. We have invested millions of dollars in compensation adjustments for public safety personnel, allowing us to retain and recruit those who protect us and come to our aid. Plus, we have put voter-approved public safety bond dollars to good use by replacing police vehicles, fire trucks and emergency-response vehicles. In addition, we have added six new firefighter/EMT positions to better serve our community.

Maintaining Rio Rancho’s high quality of life and implementing sustainable practices have been priorities for my administration. Through a public-private partnership, a solar array has been constructed to provide electricity to one of our city’s wastewater treatment plants. This project is not only good for the environment, but also for the city’s pocketbook, saving us up to $100,000 on electricity annually.

By summer 2020, Rio Rancho residents will enjoy a new signature outdoor community gathering space at City Center. Phase 1 of the new Campus Park will include an amphitheater and event lawn space designed to host a variety of special events and activities.

Making sure Rio Rancho gets what is owed to us has been a focus of my administration. When I took office, the federal government owed Rio Rancho approximately $6.2 million for the arsenic treatment facility project. With years of effort behind us, we are proud to say that now, in 2019, we have recovered the entire amount. This has allowed us to reinvest funds back into infrastructure improvements to ensure that we continue to have a reliable water system.

Continued on the next page
Progress is not only evident in our local government, but also in our private sector. Intel is adding 300 new jobs and, last year, investment at their facility topped more than $135 million dollars. Presbyterian Rust Medical Center is planning to expand by adding a new surgery center. New home construction is evident throughout Rio Rancho, including new developments along Paseo del Volcan, Loma Encantadas, and Cleveland Heights.

Several new businesses have opened in Rio Rancho, with more opening soon, and we are excited to see the revitalization of vacant buildings. Through collaboration and partnership, the new Joe Harris Elementary School will open next year, followed by the development of a nearby master-planned community and business park called Los Diamantes.

In every corner of Rio Rancho, we are seeing dramatic progress and growth. And we will continue to make forward motion if we all work together, investing in our community. For example, in March 2020, our residents will have the opportunity to vote on bonds that will allow for additional road improvements and much-needed public safety equipment and facility improvements, all without raising taxes. We have every right to be proud of our community – the best place to live in New Mexico - and by working together, we will continue to grow and prosper.
NM EDGE will have morning, afternoon and evening class sessions available.

Registration for Honing Your NM EDGE classes open until end of business day
Monday, January 6

FOR A LIST OF CLASSES BEING OFFERED, CLICK ON THE JANUARY 2020 ROAD MAP
The final segment of the discussion of Professor Forni’s rules of civility involves two of the most important rules for municipal leaders in my mind.

LISTEN

When we actively listen to another person we incorporate two of the rules we have already discussed; PAY ATTENTION and ACKNOWLEDGE OTHERS. When we actively listen we demonstrate that we are truly interested in their words and in the feeling behind the words. In other words, we value not only the message, but the messenger as well.

When it comes to active listening, we are our own worst enemy. Instead of focusing on the speaker, we are focused inward. We are planning our next statement even while the other person is still speaking—sometimes even interrupting them in order to make a point. Effective listening is compromised in more subtle ways as well. Other common methods are:

Re-direct the attention. After the other speaker has completed their thought, you leave it unacknowledged and make your own point.

Disregard and proceed. This is a very common pattern of exchange among people—even those calling themselves friends. We simply shift the conversation away from the speaker’s point to points we want to make or to our own experiences or opinions.

Re-directing conversations or disregarding and proceeding are very common in the workplace resentment and a heightening of the competitive nature in us can be the result.

In order to listen while at the same time acknowledging others and paying attention requires the listener to change their listening pattern. When listening to others, do not allow your past experiences to interfere with the attention that we should give to our present moments. Listeners should not permit what we “know” or “think we know” about another to cloud our perception of what that person is telling us, because if we “already know” we have little incentive to listen, and consequently we usually do not. The future can make you a poor listener. When we listen with the future in mind our focus is not on what the speaker is saying, but the outcome of our discussion. We re-direct or ignore and proceed with the conversation and the pursuit of our own goals takes precedence over the words and thoughts of the speaker.

Professor Forni suggests that there are three components of good listening:
A. Plan Your Listening

1. Listen with no other intent other than to listen
2. Make listening your sole goal
3. Actual silence and silence of the mind are your ultimate weapons here
4. Rediscover the allure of silence—it is indeed refreshing
5. Eliminate sources of distraction so as to afford the speaker your undivided attention
   a. Put the phone or pad down, turn away from the computer, and clear your mind so you can focus on the conversation

B. Show that you are listening

1. Establishing eye contact is the most effective way of demonstrating that you are listening
2. A slight nod or other acknowledgement or encouragement to the speaker are also good indicators
3. Briefly re-state what it was you thought you heard to reinforce your understanding of what was being conveyed

C. Be a Cooperative Listener

1. Don’t rush to agree or to disagree with the speaker—you must first demonstrate that you understand what the speaker was saying and that you understand her point of view
2. Cooperative listening means separating what is important from what is not
   a. Cooperative listening helps to give shape and direction to what the speaker has said
   b. It has to do with asking the right questions, open ended questions are preferred:
      i. How do you feel about that?
      ii. What are the alternatives?
      iii. What do you perceive as the next steps
      iv. But you must stop short of intrusion. This means, even though you might have formed your own opinion—do not voice it unless you are certain that your opinion is what is being solicited

Good listening is hard work, but it is important work. Human beings want someone to listen to them—It is a wonderful gift when we can truly accomplish it. One final thought about listening. When listening, try to listen, listen deeply.

The final “rule” of civility is one that I think is overlooked yet very important. That rule is ACCEPT AND GIVE PRAISE. It is hard to decide which is harder WHICH IS HARDER FOR YOU?

Personally, it is harder for me to accept praise. I am harder on myself than others are. And so for me, sometimes the praise I receive feels like accepting conduct or accomplishments that do not measure up to my standards. As individuals, we all crave to be appreciated and noticed—Remember RULE #2—Acknowledge others?

The ability to confer genuine praise (as opposed to flattery) is a hallmark of civility—praising others does not come easy.
As the nation rings in the new year, the U.S. Census Bureau projects the U.S. population will be 330,222,422 on Jan. 1, 2020.

The nation starts the new decade with an increase of 1,991,085 people, or 0.61%, from New Year’s Day 2019. Since Census Day (April 1) 2010, the population has grown by 21,476,884 or 6.96%.

In January 2020, the United States is expected to experience one birth every eight seconds and one death every 11 seconds.

Meanwhile, net international migration is expected to add one person to the U.S. population every 34 seconds. The combination of births, deaths and net international migration will increase the U.S. population by one person every 19 seconds.

The projected world population on Jan. 1, 2020, is 7,621,018,958, an increase of 77,684,873, or 1.03%, from New Year’s Day 2019. During January 2020, 4.3 births and 1.9 deaths are expected worldwide every second.

The Census Bureau’s U.S. and World Population Clock simulates real-time growth of the United States and world populations.
RUN THE WORLD: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

A NEW COLUMN FROM FEMALE ICMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS AND THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT [PM MAGAZINE, JANUARY 2020]

BY NINA VETTER

Welcome to our new column! Thank you to ICMA and the League of Women in Government for sponsoring and supporting our column. Every month we will hear from a different ICMA member on her experience in local government and how our service to our communities and organizations is changing the world one day at a time.

At a community event last year, two of my female employees stopped me and looked visibly upset. Then they told me a little story. A female resident of our community stopped by to see them and when they told her that it would be most helpful for her to speak to the district manager and pointed at me across the room, she said, “Are you freaking kidding me? They hired a FEMALE manager?!” She hadn’t even met me yet, but she was already upset that the manager was a female.

I had heard this or similar comments before, but never in the presence of my employees. Hours later after the event ended, I realized that I was upset, not because it was offensive toward me specifically, but because of the impact that it had on my female employees—two employees who work hard to further themselves, do their best for the community, and serve as fantastic leaders in our organization.

Even as we continue to make progress in gender equity in local government management, we will continue to face hurdles, biases, and people who just can’t see the world in a different way than their own. Our tribe of powerful, smart, driven, compassionate female managers, assistant city managers, assistant to the city managers, and so on is stronger than the gender bias that we will continue to face.

Our responsibility and our call is to not let that hold us back from pursuing the top jobs, but not just because it’s our dream. We have a responsibility to better our communities through our leadership. We have a responsibility to our female local government employees and future leaders to see and experience female leadership so that many years from now when we retire and move on, we have left our gender in an even better position to run the world.

NINA VETTER is district manager, Pueblo West Metropolitan District, Pueblo West, Colorado (nvetter@pwmd-co.us).
Some view giving praise it as relinquishing control. Seriously? Giving praise might be a shifting of focus, but I believe it solidifies rather than relinquishes control. I know I feel better about myself when I am able to genuinely bestow praise and complimentary language on others. I try to do it every day—because there certainly is no shortage of opportunities to give praise.

By sharing our feelings about others, we also convey information about ourselves and strengthen the bonds between us. By rewarding positive conduct with praise we encourage continued positive conduct. Many are unaware of the gifts they possess or do not realize how amazing and important those contributions are. By giving praise, we nurture a stronger self esteem in others.

Receiving a compliment is a gift. It is a gift we are expected to acknowledge. The best response is a simple “Thank you” said in a meaningful manner—don’t add self-deprecating commentary. That tends to diminish the intent of the person bestowing the praise.

We should never solicit praise or try to expand the sphere of the praise that was given. Likewise, if praise is given to us erroneously, we should always give credit where credit is due.

When giving praise we should not pay a compliment unless it is sincere—otherwise it is transparent. We should not refrain from giving a compliment because we assume that our feelings are already known. There is a fine line between a heart-felt compliment and a patronizing statement. Don’t confuse complimenting with patronizing. Don’t be quick to return a compliment—it makes you seem as if you do not appreciate the compliment that was given to you.

Truly meaningful compliments are worded carefully. By choosing our words carefully, the recipient will know that you put some thought into the compliment. Be specific in your praise, this also demonstrates that you put some thought into what you are saying. Start with the person in mind, why is this person worthy of praise. It is most interesting to note that compliment on small matters matter most.

Workplace compliments present a whole new set of considerations. Workplace compliments are always appropriate when related to a job well done. In fact, appreciation and recognition are essential to job satisfaction.

Being unappreciated is the number one cause of people leaving a job.

Compliments that are not work-related can be very problematic. Compliments addressed towards attire and physical appearance should be avoided. It is best to keep these impressions to yourself—it avoids misunderstandings that can lead to much larger problems. The “just kidding” defense is no longer tolerated in today’s workplace.
NMML CLASSIFIEDS (CLICK HERE)