

Welcome To Local Government!

Lessons learned as a state elected official and a city administrator.

I was elected to the Missouri House of Representatives in 1998. I represented a portion of Jefferson, Franklin and St. Louis Counties. After serving four terms, I learned a lot about Missouri. My city (Pacific) liked me so much that when I was term limited, the City hired me as its city administrator. I want to share some important lessons I learned from my experience as both a state elected official and city administrator that may benefit local elected officials:

First, if you represent a municipality, you have only one organization speaking up for you – the Missouri Municipal League. While some areas in Missouri have local leagues or lobbyists to represent them, MML is the go-to source for what affects local government throughout the state. As a Missouri State Representative, I met with MML often, and they explained how different legislation would affect my communities. The MML representative would track legislation for me and let me know when a good piece of legislation would be bad for my area.

There are times when your state representative or senator will vote on legislation that is bad for your city. Remember, they work for you. If you do not like the way your representative or senator is voting or helping your town, then run against them. I attended my city's meetings, passed legislation that benefited the city and tracked grants for them making their way through the bureaucracy in Jefferson City. You should expect the same of your Representative.

There are several policy committees that produce the Missouri Municipal League booklet we as state legislators received each year. If you are a mayor, alderperson or council member, add your voice and join one of these committees. You also need to be in frequent contact with your representative and senator.

As a representative in the legislature, we would take two years to solve a problem. However, after being on the job as a city administrator I found we had two hours to solve problems.

- I believe the most important city employee is the city clerk. I worked with two of the best, Kim Barfield in Pacific and Sarah Wheeler in St. James. If you have a good city clerk, do all you can to make that person

successful. A good city clerk will keep you, as an elected official, out of trouble.

- Hire a city attorney that specializes in municipal law. The laws are constantly changing, and you need to have an attorney that understands how this will affect your city.
- Your city administrator should be a people person. They will be working to diffuse not only constituent problems but those with employees as well. My hat is off to the people who choose to dedicate their talents to this occupation.
- Let your managers manage. Please try to stay out of the day-to-day operations. I was fortunate to work for mayors that respected that.
- The most important resource you have as a city is your employees. Give them the tools and equipment they need to do their jobs. Just as a bulletproof vest is important for your police officer, so is the right safety equipment for your other departments. My biggest fear in my years as a city administrator was that one of my employees would not be able to go home. All your employees do dangerous work. The utility clerk at the



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front window is as vulnerable as the lineman on the pole. Anything can happen.

- Cities are finding it harder and harder to find good employees. If you have them, you need to pay them a good wage. They will make your job as an elected official so much easier.
- Grants, Grants, Grants! If you don't have them, start applying. Your staff needs to be searching for grants. You can work with your local planning agency or hire a grant writer if you don't have anyone on staff. With grants obtained for the cities of Pacific and St. James, these communities were able to accomplish projects that would not have otherwise been completed. It is not too difficult, and Missouri state agencies are very helpful.
- The Missouri Municipal League sends out grant information frequently. A grant recently released was the Volkswagen Trust Fund. A city could receive up to 50% of the cost of a new truck. We took advantage of this in St. James and are replacing three very old, worn out trucks. When I drive through my community, I look around at all the projects that grants helped complete. I think of the hundreds of jobs created by getting a Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) grant for factory infrastructure. I see the many sidewalks and streetlights, new streets and trails. There is a grant available for so many of your community's needs.

I have had a great career and was able to work with some

great folks. I would have never chosen this line of work but am so glad it found me. The fulfillment was in seeing how much improvement was achieved and the dedication of the people who make local government work. 🌱

Harold Selby started his public service as a volunteer firefighter and EMT with the Eureka Fire District. After a four-year term on the Jefferson County 911 Board of Directors, he successfully ran for state representative. In 2005, Selby was hired by the city of Pacific as city administrator, serving for 10 years before moving to the city of St. James to serve as their city administrator until his recent retirement.

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