



Accountability Strengthens Good Government

Good government depends on good people. Recent investigations involving local governments in North Carolina, most notably the Town of Cary and Town of Pilot Mountain, have understandably raised concerns about public trust, financial stewardship, and accountability. Whenever public officials misuse taxpayer resources or violate the public's trust, they must be held accountable. The North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCMA) does not excuse unethical conduct, nor should anyone else. (ncmanagers.org)

But individual failures are not systemic failures and should not be used to discredit an entire profession or the council-manager form of government that serves communities across our state.

The council-manager form of government was created more than a century ago to reduce political patronage, improve transparency, and bring professional expertise to local government. Residents elect governing boards to establish policy and priorities. Those elected officials then appoint a professionally educated and experienced manager to carry out those policies, oversee daily operations, and remain accountable to the entire governing board. Professional management strengthens and supports democratic governance - it does not replace it.

In 2019, national research by scholars Nelson and Alfonso at the UNC School of Government found that municipalities operating under the council-manager form were 57 percent less likely to experience public corruption convictions than municipalities operating under the mayor-council form ([Study Confirms Council-Manager Governments Are More Ethical | icma.org](https://www.icma.org/research/study-confirms-council-manager-governments-are-more-ethical)). While no system can eliminate misconduct, the findings reinforce that professional management, coupled with effective oversight, can significantly reduce the risk of corruption.

This council-manager model has helped North Carolina become nationally recognized for strong local government management and sound fiscal stewardship. It succeeds because of partnerships among governing boards, professional managers, the Local Government Commission, the Offices of the State Treasurer and State Auditor, the UNC School of Government, the NC League of Municipalities, and the NC Association of County Commissioners. Together, these organizations provide oversight, education, research, and professional development that fosters ethical leadership, fiscal responsibility, and accountable local government.

No system of government is immune from misconduct. Poor decisions and unethical behavior can occur in any profession or organizational structure. The appropriate response is not to abandon a system that has served communities well for generations, but to reinforce the

safeguards that make it work like ethical leadership, strong internal controls, transparent decision-making, and vigilant oversight.

Professional ethics are central to local government management. Members of NCCCMA subscribe to the International City/County Management Association's (ICMA) Code of Ethics ([ICMA Code of Ethics | icma.org](https://www.icma.org)), one of the few professional codes backed by a formal peer-review and enforcement process. Managers who violate those standards face investigation, public censure, suspension, expulsion from the profession, or revocation of professional credentials. Accountability is not merely encouraged - it is expected.

The overwhelming majority of North Carolina's city and county managers quietly serve their communities every day with integrity, professionalism, and an unwavering commitment to the public interest. They safeguard taxpayer resources, provide expert advice to elected officials, and deliver essential services without regard to politics or personal gain.

Public confidence depends on accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement. NCCCMA welcomes opportunities to work alongside oversight agencies, elected officials, and other partners to strengthen public trust, share lessons learned, and reinforce the ethical standards that define our profession.

Moments like these should remind us why professional local government management exists—not why it should be questioned. The public deserves both accountability and professionalism.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R. Eddie Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "R. Eddie" and the last name "Smith" clearly distinguishable.

R. Eddie Smith
President, NC City and County Managers Association (NCCCMA)