

*i s s u e s o f*  
**D e m o c r a c y**



DEMOCRATIC  
LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT

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VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1

# Democratic Local Government

THE AMERICAN SYSTEM of federalism allows for strong local government that is distinct and separate from that practiced at both the federal and state levels. The result is a complicated web of intergovernmental relations, with certain powers authorized at each level, but there are also limitations. Powers at the local level are granted by the Constitution but how they are structured is not spelled out. The structure of local government can take a number of different forms, involving elected mayors, councils and appointed city managers. The purpose of this journal is to present an overview of democratic local government in the United States.

Professor Ellis Katz of the Center for the Study of Federalism at Temple University examines how the ideas of self-government and federalism affect local government. The mayor of Abilene, Texas, Gary D. McCaleb, discusses how communities need to work together to solve problems that often transcend borders.



David R. Berman, professor of political science at Arizona State University, explains how local and state governments use their powers to raise revenue. The outgoing mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, Emanuel Cleaver II, and two former mayors, Gene Roberts of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Art Agnos of San Francisco, California, hold a dialogue on how U.S. cities market themselves for economic development. Bruce Adams, founder and president of A Greater Washington, an alliance of business and community leaders, writes on how local government has evolved over the past two centuries and suggests ways for communities to follow in the new millennium. In profiling a city—Atlanta, Georgia—where diversity plays a major role, contributing editor David Pitts looks at how government and citizens continue the struggle to make it a city that works for everyone.

*The Colorado State House of Representatives  
in session.*

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# Local Self-Government in the United States

by Ellis Katz

Local governments in the United States exist within the complicated web of intergovernmental relations created by American federalism that both limits what local governments can do and, at the same time, empowers them to undertake activities and programs that they otherwise could not do. In this study of local self-government in the United States, Ellis Katz, professor emeritus of political science and fellow of the Center for the Study of Federalism at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, examines how the ideas of self-government and federalism affect the organization and functioning of local government.

THE CONSTITUTION of the United States creates a national government with limited powers. While these powers are very broad, and have expanded enormously since the Constitution was written in 1789, it is still assumed that the national government has only those powers delegated to it by the Constitution; all other powers remain with the states. There is no mention of local government in the U.S. Constitution, and it is widely understood that local government is a matter of state, not federal concern.

This is not to say that the federal government has no influence over local government. The federal Constitution, for example, prohibits state and local governments from infringing upon the civil rights and liberties of their residents; it precludes them from enacting laws that discriminate against citizens of other states; and it prohibits tax and regulatory policies that handicap businesses in other states. In



*Ellis Katz*

addition, cities and other units of local government participate in the federal government's grant-in-aid system, by which the federal government provides over \$225 billion in grants to state and local governments annually for a wide variety of purposes ranging from community development to education to child nutrition. Nevertheless, local government is a matter for the states, not the federal government.

According to conventional legal theory, local governments are created by state government. Their institutional structures are defined, their responsibilities are delineated and their powers of taxation all are derived from state government. In fact, it is the state government that gives local governments "the breath of life," without which, they could not even exist. Whatever legal theory might say, the political reality is that America's cities and towns enjoy a remarkable degree of autonomy and independence.

## A Passion for Popular Sovereignty

Writing 167 years ago, the French journalist Alexis de Tocqueville observed that the United States' pattern of local government reflected America's passion for popular sovereignty. By this, he meant that individuals and families joined together to form local communities, which, in turn, federated to form states, which ultimately led to the creation of the national government.

Forgiving some exaggeration, Tocqueville's observation does capture the important fact that local units of government are not created by some higher authority, such as the state or national government, but are created by the people themselves, and represent popular and enduring expressions of how we think about local government in the United States.

## A Variety of Communities

Americans live in a wide variety of local communities. Overall, there are almost 36,000 cities and towns in the United States today. Almost 45 million Americans live in large cities with a population of over 250,000, another 40 million live in medium-sized cities of between 50,000 and 250,000, and yet another 40 million live in small cities of between 10,000 and 50,000. Despite being "a nation of cities," 123 million Americans—almost 50 percent of the total population—live in cities of less than 10,000 residents, in unincorporated towns and townships, or in rural areas.

The size of the population of a local community affects both the kinds of services that can be provided and the nature of civic life. In

the United States, many very small local communities cannot provide for their own police and fire services, schools and libraries, or sewage and trash disposal systems. These small communities often join with other nearby communities to share these services, or they contract with state or county government to provide them.

At the same time, the sheer size of very large cities has an impact upon the structure of government and the quality of civic life. Large cities, for example, tend to have strong mayoral systems of government because, it is believed, only a single powerful individual can provide leadership and mobilize resources in a large and diverse community. Many medium-sized and smaller communities provide for nonpartisan, professionally trained city managers to oversee the day-to-day operations of government. Small towns, on the other hand, often have commission-type forms of government in which both legislative and executive authority are vested in an elected commission. In smaller communities, it is not unusual for almost every resident to have a relative or friend who personally knows some important political leader. Thus, personal access to political decision-makers is much easier in small communities than in large cities.

### Moving from Cities to Suburbs

One of the great demographic trends that has affected where and how Americans live has been the move from cities to suburbs. This move has led to the creation of large metropolitan areas that may include one or more sub-

stantial-sized cities and many contiguous smaller independent communities.

This pattern of urban-suburban life poses difficult problems of governance. For example, the city of Philadelphia has approximately 1.5 million residents, but the Philadelphia metropolitan area (narrowly defined to include only Philadelphia and the four surrounding counties in the state of Pennsylvania) has almost 4 million inhabitants, organized politically into three cities, 92 boroughs (small cities, usually with less than 10,000 residents) and 145 townships.

Typically, an individual might be a resident of, pay taxes to, and elect the officials of a city or town, an independent school district, several special districts, a county, and the state and national governments. It is no wonder that there are almost 500,000 elected public officials in the United States today.

In many countries of the world, this proliferation of governments would be intolerable, and cities would simply expand to annex their surrounding territories, or some sort of all-encompassing metropolitan government would be created. At a minimum, the small, suburban governments would be forced to consolidate into larger units.

In the United States, however, citizens have resisted these efforts, and have been quite ingenious in finding ways to coordinate public services while maintaining the integrity of their local communities. In general, state constitutions and state laws provide for incorporated municipalities and unincorporated towns and townships as general-purpose local governments, counties as administrative subdivisions of the state, school districts and over 33,000 other special districts that serve limited pur-



poses which provide and coordinate services across jurisdictional lines without creating larger governmental units.

### Subdivisions of Local Government

Every state except Connecticut and Rhode Island is divided into counties. Counties are subdivisions of the state itself. They tend to cover large geographic territories and, because counties vary so much in size, state law typically divides them into categories based on population. Thus, there may be slight variations in the powers of county government that vary with population. Counties may include urban, suburban or rural populations (or even combinations of all three) and, not surprisingly, their functions may vary with the nature of their demography. Their principal functions are judicial administration, public safety and the organization of elections, although in recent years they have taken on a variety of new functions, such as solid waste disposal, public health, libraries, technical and community colleges and environmental protection.

Townships were originally subdivisions of county government and were primarily responsible for road maintenance. Today, townships carry out a full range of governmental functions, such as police and fire protection, trash collection, zoning and land use, recreation and economic development. State law usually categorizes them according to population size or density. In many states, they are indistinguishable from small cities, except that they lack municipal charters.

Cities are municipal corporations that operate under charters from the state. Until the last half of the 18th century, the tendency was for the state to grant each municipality a charter unique to its needs. During the second half of the last century, as urbanization increased, most states provided for general municipal charters (sometimes with some optional features) so that upon reaching a certain population (typically 10,000) a local community could apply to the state for a charter and become a municipal corporation.

Typically, local communities of different populations receive different types of charters, so that the charters of large cities tend to establish a different form of government than is characteristic of smaller cities, and large cities tend to have more taxing and regulatory authority than do small cities. But, in all cases, the powers granted to a municipal corporation are to be narrowly interpreted. According to Judge John Dillon's famous 1868 opinion:

*It is a general and undisputed proposition that a municipal corporation possesses and can exercise the following powers, and no others: first, those granted in express words; second, those necessarily or fairly implied in or incident to the powers expressly granted; third, those essential to the accomplishment of the declared objects and purposes of the corporation—not simply convenient, but indispensable. Any fair, reasonable, substantial doubt concerning the existence of a power is resolved by the courts against a corporation, and the power is denied.*

“Dillon's Rule,” as it became known, while technically correct, flies in the face of the historical and political reality observed by Tocqueville only 37 years earlier.

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## Home Rule

To counter Dillon's restrictive view of local authority, states adopted a new way to charter local governments, one more way in keeping with the American tradition of popular sovereignty.

For example, beginning in the state of Missouri in 1875, the states began to change their constitutions to provide for home rule for local communities. Pennsylvania's home rule constitutional provision is typical, and provides that "Municipalities shall have the right and power to frame home rule charters." Operating under such charters, "a municipality may exercise any power or perform any function not denied by this Constitution, by its home rule charter, or by the General Assembly." Pennsylvania, by legislation, also extends the home rule option to counties and townships.

Today, many states have some sort of constitutional provision for home rule. Under most home rule provisions, the residents of a local community write and adopt their own charter that serves as a kind of constitution for the city. While home rule charters go far in restoring the historical independence and autonomy of local communities, citizens cannot adopt charters that offend the state constitution or state laws. Furthermore, state courts are called upon to interpret home rule charters and often have fallen back on Dillon's Rule to take a narrow view of local authority.

## School and Special Districts

In addition to counties, townships and municipalities, states also create school districts and other special districts. School districts are a good example of the tension between local and

state forces. Historically, state law simply empowered (and sometimes required) local communities to create public schools. The schools were organized, regulated and financed by the local community. As public education became more complicated, and as the state financed a greater share of the cost of education, the state's role in such important matters as curriculum and school personnel expanded. Today there is continuing tension between local and state forces for control of the schools within a community.

Special districts, whether concerned with solid waste disposal, mass transportation, fire protection, or other matters, have developed for two reasons. First, because state constitutions limit local indebtedness, special districts are sometimes created to finance large capital projects through the issuance of public bonds. Second, because some problems cross the boundaries of several local governments, a special district might be created to address a particular inter-jurisdictional problem. Whatever their precise structure and authority, these special districts have proven useful in fending off the consolidation of small local units of government into larger regional governments.

## Accountable Local Self-Government

In thinking about local government, perhaps the key question is: to whom are local governments accountable?

In some countries, local governments are really local administrations, and local officials are accountable to some higher authority. In such countries, revenue collection tends to be centralized, central authorities often audit local

expenditures, and sometimes there is even some kind of appointed governor who oversees the activities of local officials.

In the United States, however, local officials are primarily accountable to their local citizens. Local communities raise the bulk of their own revenues, the centralized audit function is extremely limited, and state departments of community affairs exist merely to provide services to local governments, not to oversee their operations.

Local governments are not entirely autonomous and independent, however. They exist within the overall framework of a state's constitution and laws, much as the American states, themselves, exist within the framework of the Constitution of the United States. Indeed, a few states—Connecticut, New Hampshire and many of the New England and Middle Atlantic states, for example—operate almost as if they were federations of their local communities. However, some other states—Idaho, New Mexico and many of the Western and Southern states—are substantially more centralized and carefully control the operations of their local communities.

However we conceptualize the local-state relationship, we must recognize that there will always be a tension between the advocates of local self-government and the advocates of centralization. The very fact that this tension exists, and that local communities and states bargain with each other about the relative powers of each, is evidence that Tocqueville's 19th century observation about how much we value our local institutions is still very much a part of the American system.

# Solution-Shaped Government

by Dr. Gary D. McCaleb

From a global perspective, the way we live and work permeates practically every dimension of our lives and consequently portends potential impact at every level of government. In this introspective look at how global technology affects our lives, Dr. Gary D. McCaleb, the mayor of Abilene, Texas, uses the United States as an example in discussing how communities need to pull together to solve problems that often transcend borders.

TWO WORDS frequently used to describe change in the way we live are “global” and “technology.” As the issues change, government must also change in the way it responds. What must not change is the clear understanding that democratic local government is no less important in affecting the outcome of such change.

## A New Era

The most discussed issue at a recent meeting of locally elected officials in Washington, D.C. was “electronic commerce,” often known as “e-commerce.” In 1998, American consumers made billions of dollars in purchases. Most of these electronic commerce transactions were done by e-mail. The total expenditures via this unique purchasing method are expected to continue to grow in 1999 and beyond.

Because these purchases were made without patronizing local businesses, no sales tax was collected for local or state government, and



Gary McCaleb

thus no revenue was garnered. Several sessions at the Washington meeting brought together local and U.S. government officials to discuss ways to resolve the potential problems created by this new challenge.

But in a larger sense, the issue of electronic commerce may well serve as a symbol of the new era and the changing nature of the issues impacting local government in the United States. If 1998 becomes the year remembered as the beginning of the “age of electronic commerce,” it should also be recognized for sending the following message to all government officials:

*As technology changes the ways we live and work, it will also change the nature of the challenges for local government and therefore call for new ways to meet those challenges.*

In this case, old solutions will not solve new problems. The framework currently in place worked rather well for the way the United

States did business prior to 1998, but it offers no satisfactory solution to doing business in this new age.

### Virtual Borders

The age of electronic mail and electronic commerce treats fundamental components of our thinking in different ways. City limits and county lines mean virtually nothing. State lines and national borders are of diminishing significance. Distance is measured in minutes rather than miles.

Until recently, a city might be defined as the area in which one would find home, work, school, church, shops, entertainment and recreation. It is becoming more and more likely that the location for some, if not most, of those parts of life are in different cities, sometimes in different states and occasionally in different countries. The lines of city, county and state have become blurred if not erased. Those same lines are therefore no longer as likely to contain complete problems or complete solutions.

A brief look at five different areas—commerce, safety, health, education and community—will demonstrate how the changing nature of problems calls for new ways of thinking about the role and response of local governments in the United States.

### Commerce

Commerce has long been an issue with important local implications and it will continue to be so. The advent of electronic commerce means that local citizens will shop in new and different ways. It also means that people will work in dif-

ferent ways. The massive downsizing of traditional industrial jobs is occurring simultaneously with an explosion of employment opportunities in the high-tech information field. This has created both positive and negative consequences at the local level.

Some cities have seen the positive effects counterbalance the negative. Other cities have been impacted far more by one than the other. The same technology that allows people to purchase by electronic commerce can shift jobs from where people would have shopped to where they will shop.

Services also are being relocated electronically. Mail once sorted by hand can now be sorted electronically from some distant location. In my city of Abilene, several hundred jobs were recently created to electronically encode mail located in cities hundred of miles away.

The widespread use of cellular phones, fax machines and e-mail now allows many people to work from a location of their choice. One entrepreneurial businessman recently remarked that he could operate his multi-state, transnational air-cargo business from anywhere as long as he had phone, fax and e-mail access.

## Safety

Surveys of locally elected officials in the United States have found safety concerns consistently at the top of the list. Crime has become inseparably connected to drugs and drug trafficking crosses all lines—at city, county, state and national levels. Thus, it has become impossible and impractical to separate the local drug/crime issues from the international drug/crime issues.

Law enforcement officials know they can be more effective in their work if the problem is defined and approached at both the neighborhood and national levels. New technology is being used to develop programs which create new ways for neighbors to work with one another and for nations to work together.

But safety issues do not shape themselves neatly across city, state or national lines. Contemporary solutions call for new thinking. Many of the most successful new solutions to safety and other issues come from recognizing that a problem does not belong exclusively to a city, a state or a country. Issues defy the lines of these traditional lines of thinking, calling for yet-to-be-defined solutions. The attempt to solve these problems in the age of technology will call for the city, state and federal levels of government to find new ways of working together to shape successful solution strategies.

The drug traffic issue provides a helpful illustration. The area along both sides of the border between nations defines the problem and thus a corresponding solution strategy. It is not exclusively a national problem; all parts of the nation cannot equally contribute to the solution and neither can all states or all cities. Yet, it is a problem which suggests that some resources and involvement are needed from each of the three levels of government. For example, the federal government should work beyond its traditional position in both directions (transnational and sub-national) and the local government should reach beyond its area (in terms of regions and neighborhoods) and provide new and more promising solutions.

From the perspective of history, this approach represents a complete reversal for the role of a city. For hundreds of years, the city

offered safety to its inhabitants through the security of its walls. But those ancient walls were removed much more easily than the “walled thinking” of both city and federal officials regarding the role of local government in solving today’s problems.

## Health

City health issues include, but are not limited to, adequate and safe drinking water, refuse disposal and control of contagious diseases. All three issues are examples of ways the nature of the problem or the shape of the best solution could lie outside the jurisdiction of the city, but remain in the community at large.

Yet, the federal government has become involved in all three of these areas in the United States. Much of its involvement recently took the form of congressional legislation known as “federal unfunded mandates.” This legislation was resented at the local level for three reasons: the rules for solution were formulated at the federal level without input from the states; the solutions were unfunded, thus leaving the considerable cost of implementation to local budgets; and the solutions were mandated, leaving no freedom to local governments to shape their own solution, but instead, imposing stiff financial penalties for failure to comply.

Issues of safe water and refuse disposal are not entirely within traditional city limits. Innovative solutions are being found as groups of American cities sharing a common problem within their region work together. Ten years ago there were 31 landfills in the Abilene area of West Texas. Today there are six. There were no mandates, total costs were reduced and regional cooperation was enhanced. Similar

approaches have occurred among cities sharing the same water source or seeking to build a common reservoir.

## Education

An old issue that is returning with new intensity to the forefront in the United States is education. Perhaps no issue better demonstrates the ability to encompass, at the same time, both personal and global implications.

American parents have become increasingly concerned about the quality of education. State and federal officials have spoken frequently about their concern for the ways that education in the public schools impacts the local work force. Studies have reported that the situation is not improving. Some city governments including Chicago and Boston, feel they must become more directly involved in the local schools. Failure to properly respond to the education issues will tend to permeate other issues such as work force and safety.

This personal and local perspective is counterbalanced by the global growth of what is called “distance-learning.” Virtual schools are electronically enrolling thousands of students across state and national borders. Future implications of electronic education extend into other areas, including commerce, jobs and travel.

## Community

While this issue is perhaps less tangible and more difficult to define, it cannot be ignored. The degree to which people feel a sense of connectedness to others is important. The extent to which the dialogue within the city

can be framed in terms of “we” rather than “they” makes a difference in the way problems are perceived and solutions are framed. The way that community issues are addressed and resolved has much to do with drawing us together or pulling us apart. Community issues in the United States include cultural and economic diversity, unemployment, hunger and homelessness. These issues are frequently listed by the federal government as top priorities for legislation and funding. Yet, some of the best work is being done at the local level, often by nongovernment organizations (NGOs) or other nonprofit organizations.

### New Alliances, New Designs

If government at any level is to provide better service to its citizens and better solutions to their problems, the traditional levels that are usually associated with government cannot operate in isolation. Local government must be able to work in alliance with federal and state government as a partner rather than as an outside interest group. At the same time, local government must also create appropriate alliances with business, nonprofit and nongovernment organizations and agencies. Regions should cross city limits and county lines and, possibly even state lines.

This is already happening in Columbus, Ohio, which is addressing many issues with a six-county metropolitan area approach. In the Seattle, Washington, area a regional council of almost 30 mayors was recently formed to work cooperatively on issues of public safety, transportation, environment and tourism. The central valley of California is working on new ways to do regional planning for issues such as hous-

ing, transportation and water for a population of 5 million in an area projected to reach 15 million by 2040.

A regional approach may be the best hope of a new relationship with the federal government because both sides will have moved outside their traditional “walled thinking.” As this occurs, the importance of “decentralization” and “devolution” at the federal level will take on new meaning. A truly decentralized federal government reaching down to the regionalized local government should result in the two levels finding new and effective ways of working together.

The new designs come when the new alliances embrace the new technology of the age. For city government, this means, first, a new alliance with the people on behalf of their neighborhood, and second, a new alliance with the federal government, on behalf of the regions. In doing so, the new solutions will better fit the new problems. And, as a result, new meaning is given to Abraham Lincoln’s description of government “of the people, by the people and for the people.”



# The Powers of Local Government in the United States

by David R. Berman

Several years ago the mayor of a medium-sized American city identified his three major problems as “money, finances and revenues.” He, like other local government officials in the United States, had limited control over his financial problems. With an improved economy in the United States today, strains on local budgets have eased somewhat. Still, there is much the states could do to help local officials cope with the financial demands on them, as well as limit their own agendas in dealing with local governments. It is a story as old as the Republic itself. What should be the powers of local and state government, particularly to raise revenue, and how independent should they be from the federal government? In the following article, David R. Berman, political science professor at Arizona State University and an expert on state and local government, explains the nature of the U.S. system, and highlights some trends. This article is adapted from his analysis of state and local government relations that first appeared in the *Municipal Year Book*.

WHEN THE FOUNDING FATHERS of the American Revolution met in Philadelphia in 1787 to write the U.S. Constitution, a cardinal principle on which they all agreed was that power should not be concentrated in one person, or among one group or in one place. Having suffered the effects of what they felt was arbitrary rule from a colonial power, they were intent on encasing the Republic’s new form of government in a system of checks and balances to preserve the liberties of people who were now citizens and not subjects.

The division of power at the federal level between the president, Congress and the Supreme Court is the most salient example of the checks and balances in the U.S. Constitution—but not the only one. The Founding Fathers also wanted a check and balance on the power exercised by the federal government over the states and localities. James Madison, regarded as the most important architect of the Constitution, stated it succinctly.



*David R. Berman*

“The powers delegated...to the federal government are few and defined.” Accordingly, the Founders determined that local government in the United States should be under the control—loosely under the control—of the states, and not the federal government.

The U.S. government has the power to tax and spend, but so do local authorities—under the guidance of the states—-independent of the federal government. Overseas visitors are often astounded by the myriad of issues determined at the local level in the United States, a degree of decentralization once viewed as wasteful and confusing by some, but now increasingly of interest in countries where concentration of power at the center has led to less than desirable results.

The U.S. view always has been that government is best that is closest to the people. And if, for example, Kansans want to pave their highways differently from North Carolinians, or establish a different school curriculum, the

Constitution guarantees that they may do so. Indeed, most states afford their local governments considerable flexibility in maximizing local control independent of state government, let alone the federal government. This includes the raising of local revenues within certain parameters which differ widely from state to state.

### Major Sources of Local Revenue

Local authorities—mostly county and city governments—in the United States raise over 65 percent of their own revenues, a significant portion that most would like to either maintain or increase based on the belief that locally generated revenues maximize local control. The remainder of their funding is obtained from a variety of sources, including the individual state and federal governments. But some of that assistance comes with strings attached.

As far as locally generated revenues are concerned, a major source of funding in almost every locality is the property tax on homes and commercial real estate. For the most part, significant property holdings, as well as income, are considered as major sources for the funding of government. Property taxes are the largest, single source of local government revenues—at about 26 percent of their total funding. Five percent of local government revenues comes from locally adopted sales taxes (allowed by slightly more than half the states), two percent comes from an individual local income tax (allowed by a small number of states), and about 14 percent from user fees and miscellaneous charges.

States also contribute to the local revenue pot, mostly in the form of grants and through returning a portion of state tax revenues to local governments. Grants are usually designated for specific programs, such as for education or transportation, though most states also provide unrestricted grants as well. State sales, income and gasoline tax revenues are the funding sources most often shared with local governments. As is the case with grants, some of this revenue is unrestricted, and some is earmarked for specific purposes, such as highway improvements. State aid to cities generally averages about a third of all state expenditures.

Over the past two decades, user fees have been used increasingly to finance a variety of services at the local level—everything from paying for water and sewage to funding various forms of transportation services. The trend is based on the belief that, ideally, the direct user of a service should pay for it. Even indirect users are sometimes assessed. For example, fees are often imposed on developers of residential and commercial real estate to offset the costs of building or expanding, roads, sewers and other services that facilitate their projects.

Additional revenues are earned from a variety of other sources, including locally owned enterprises, such as state-operated alcoholic beverage stores and legalized gambling operations, and the issuance of local bonds, particularly for highway projects.

### Checks On Local Government

The powers granted to the states under the Constitution—and through the states to local government—are viewed as a check and bal-

ance on federal control. In recent years, however, voters have sought to check the power of local government as well, especially in cases where they considered that taxes were too high or the programs of municipal authorities too ambitious.

In addition to the obvious check provided by elections, voters in many cities have made use of referenda to force changes on both state and local government. Referenda, or ballot initiatives, an example of direct democracy, are in use in about half the states.

In recent decades, California voters have set the pace. In 1978, they approved Proposition 13, which capped local property tax rates and limited increases in assessed property values except when the property was sold. Through the adoption of a series of other propositions, California now requires that virtually all local revenue-raising actions (taxes, fees, charges) be approved by two-thirds or more of the voters.

Similar restrictions on the power of state and local government have been forced in other states—not by the federal government—but by the voters themselves. In states that do not have referenda, voters and other interested parties often work through state legislatures to enact restrictions on local governments they believe have become too powerful.

Media also act as a check on local government in the United States. Although there are a few national broadcast networks and national newspapers, most media in the U.S. are local. If local government proposes a tax increase, for example, whether considered justified or not, the local newspapers, television and radio stations will, without fail, report on it and make sure citizens are informed.

## Trends in Local Government in the U.S.

Whereas there has been a trend in recent years for voters to try to restrict the powers of local government, there also has been a countervailing trend at the state and federal level toward more decentralization or devolution in asking local authorities to undertake more initiatives locally and to pick up more of the cost.

This has encouraged local governments to generate even more creative schemes for raising revenue. They include: targeted tax increases, contracting out city services and entering into partnerships with other local governments to rationalize service delivery. In most cases, states look upon the creation of such regional efforts and initiatives with favor.

While securing more revenue authority is still important to local officials, some have placed equal or even greater emphasis on reducing state mandates, that is, costly programs that state governments require local administrations to adapt without providing funding. Consequently, there is a trend toward the reduction of state mandates on local authorities.

The trend toward more decentralization is not absolute, however. Some states have assumed more responsibility, particularly for the financing of local courts and prisons, for indigent health care and certain forms of welfare assistance. Shifting financial responsibility for a program to the state provides financial relief to local governments, but the price is sometimes a loss of local control, which some jurisdictions are reluctant to accept.

The precise relationship between state and local government is clearly complex and evol-

ing. It also is wildly diverse. In some states, local governments have much more independence from the state—and revenue-raising authority—than in others. There is no one pattern of local government in the United States, nor one universal relationship between a state and the local jurisdictions within it.

It also is clear that power and authority between the two levels of government often have ebbed and flowed during different periods in American history—in response to court rulings, and to economic, social, political and technological circumstances. Some cities are wealthier than others and better able to run their own affairs. Some are more dependent on the state for assistance. The overall trend in recent years on balance is toward returning as much authority as possible to local government.

A consistent principle throughout the history of the United States, however, is that state governments—and through them local authorities—have separate powers under the Constitution that the federal government cannot abrogate. The principle is enshrined in the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, which reads: “The powers not delegated to the United States (the federal government), nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people.”

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## Advocates for Local Government

Toward the end of the last century, and in this century especially, a number of organizations formed to represent the interests of local government at the state as well as at the national level. Two of the most important are the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

The National League of Cities seeks to influence state government on behalf of local governments primarily through its state municipal leagues. The state municipal league movement began in the late 19th century. It now provides services to cities and acts as a forum to promote cooperation among cities in addition to its key role of serving municipal interests at the state level.

Among the services provided by the U.S. Conference of Mayors are information and technical assistance to city governments. It also produces reports about major problems confronting cities and conducts national education campaigns to persuade the public and officials serving in other levels of government of the importance of local issues. Both the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors also represent the interests of cities at the federal level.

# The New Face of Atlanta

by David Pitts

During the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Atlanta, Georgia, earned a reputation as a city where blacks and whites, the two major ethnic groups living there, could get along. It became known as the city that is too busy to hate and, later, as the capital of the New South. In recent years, however, Atlanta's population has become even more diverse as new immigrants from all over the world, attracted by the city's economic boom, have moved to the area. Contributing editor David Pitts explores the new face of Atlanta and looks at how the city and county governments, civil rights organizations, NGOs and committed individuals continue the struggle to make Atlanta a city that works for everyone.

YOU CAN FEEL the history just walking along the streets of this Southern city. In 1864, it was burned to the ground on the orders of General William Tecumseh Sherman after his Union troops captured it during their march through the vanquished states of the Confederacy, an event immortalized in the minds of moviegoers around the world in "Gone With The Wind." The restored home of Margaret Mitchell, the author of the book on which the movie was based, is a much visited attraction here.

In more recent decades, Atlanta became famous as the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the leader of the American civil rights movement. The Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, the institution his widow, Coretta, built in his memory, stands next to the Ebenezer Baptist Church where he preached racial brotherhood at a time when it was controversial.

In many ways, Atlanta is a study in black and white—of how two races, once far apart because of a legally imposed system of segregation, gradually learned to live together. It is a journey—people here will remind you—that is not yet complete.

### The New Atlantans

In the Atlanta of the 1990s, however, “everyone” means more than just black and white Americans, and the language spoken here is no longer just English. Increasingly, long-term residents are living next door to Africans, Asians, Central and South Americans, and East Europeans. Atlanta is becoming a melting pot, the latest in a long line of American cities to become a mecca for immigrants.

Some of the newcomers are internal migrants from cities like Miami and New York, but many are immigrants and refugees whose first home in America is Atlanta. More than 450,000 immigrants and 65,000 refugees now live in metro Atlanta out of a total area population of three-and-one-half million, according to the Center for Applied Research and Anthropology at Georgia State University.

A favorite gathering spot for many of the newcomers is the Buford Highway Flea Market just outside the city. Sun Kim, an immigrant from Korea who runs a jewelry store in the market, says she came to Atlanta three years ago because she had relatives here and because they “told me the city has lots of opportunities because of the economy.” She also gives another reason: the city’s affordability. “Atlanta is a much cheaper place to live than many other cities—especially housing.”

Vanessa Kosky, from Venezuela, speaks fluent English and helps new immigrants “mostly from Central and South America to get tags and titles for their cars.” The Buford market is “a favorite gathering spot,” she says, especially for Latinos “most of whom came here to take jobs in the construction trade, which are plentiful because of the building boom. They adjust very well; the main problem is learning English.”

Sun Kim and Vanessa Kosky are part of the new face of Atlanta, a city much more cosmopolitan than it was just a few years ago. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that between 1990 and 1994, Atlanta’s population grew by 11 percent. During the same period, the Hispanic and Asian populations grew by 42 percent. The number of East Europeans and Africans is growing even more rapidly. More than 5,000 Nigerians, for example, now live in Atlanta, one reason recent political developments in their homeland was front page news here. City officials say Atlanta’s credentials as a leader in desegregation helped it establish a reputation for fairness and openness that is attractive to newcomers.

In the 1980s, the State Department picked Atlanta as one of the main cities to receive refugees. Preparations for the 1996 Olympics attracted additional numbers of immigrants in search of the jobs that came with it. Some stayed, many of them Hispanics—over 240,000 now live here—making Atlanta one of the most Hispanic cities in the United States.

### A Booming Economy

“The explanation for the move of immigrants to Atlanta is the city’s booming economy,”

says Kevin Hanna, president of the Atlanta Development Authority, a city agency. Attracting business and promoting economic growth “has helped enormously” to ensure that diversity works in a city that already had a reputation for welcoming minorities, he adds.

In this respect, Atlanta’s record is second to none. According to *Fortune* magazine, the city led the nation during the 1990s in job creation. More than 700 of the nation’s Fortune 1000 companies have operations here and 23 are headquartered here, among them Coca-Cola and Bell South. The world’s broadcast news network, CNN, also counts the city as its home.

The Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce is working with elected local officials to make the city’s pro-business climate even more attractive to companies wishing to locate here. Their initiatives are the basis of “Forward Atlanta,” a five-year economic development marketing campaign that is worldwide in scope.

Much of the growth has been in Atlanta’s suburbs, but the city also has benefited from the boom. According to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, in a recent story titled “Central City Comeback,” more than three dozen projects are rising in the center city or taking shape on developers’ drawing boards and in corporate boardrooms.

“Atlanta is doing better than almost any other place,” says Dr. Art Murphy of Georgia State University, an expert on new immigrants. “It has developed into an international city with a reputation for affordability, a hospitable environment for minorities and immigrants, and a high quality of life,” he adds.

“Officials here realized long ago that business wants to locate to cities renowned for their quality of life as well as their commitment to economic progress,” Hanna says. Top class universities, a flourishing arts community and plunging crime rates—the lowest in 30 years—all are important in attracting business and this in turn helps create an environment that is conducive to good relations among the ethnic groups which live here, he continues.

Reducing crime has been a particular focus of the local government, which, like some other cities such as New Orleans and New York, has sought to make its police force more professional and better equipped. Among the measures passed by the city council just this year was a \$2,000 raise for police officers. Public safety programs account for almost 50 percent of the general-fund budget. Much of that is for police and courts, but a significant portion also is expended on crime prevention and community relations, including relations with the new immigrant community.

### Bridging the Gap

Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) also are involved in the city’s community relations effort. Bridging the Gap is an NGO that particularly caters to new immigrants. “You have to reach out to these groups with special programs that help with everyday problems of adjusting to a new society and a new city,” says Gail Hoffman, director of the organization, which was formed in 1994 and receives funding from both government and private foundations.

“For example, many of the new immigrants come from countries where they were afraid of





*Immigrants settling in Atlanta receive training for U.S. citizenship from nongovernment organizations.*

the police and the government. That is why we began a program of workshops to help them understand the system here” and their democratic rights, Hoffman notes. In some of the countries from which the new immigrants came, the police force, for example, is a national organization in contrast to the United States, where it is municipally organized and responsible to elected local officials; for this reason, many new immigrants are suspicious of authority, she adds.

Among the services that Bridging the Gap provides are: diversity training for local law enforcement, a bank of interpreters to help new immigrants who have not yet learned English, citizenship classes, crime prevention, and legal aid on immigration and other issues. The organization also convenes meetings among different ethnic groups in the city. Creating better

understanding is a two-way street, says Hoffman. Long-term residents “also need to understand the cultures of the new immigrants and the value of them.”

Some new immigrants also benefit from the city’s commitment to affirmative action, initially begun as a means to achieve greater opportunities for women and African Americans. Currently, more than 800 businesses in Atlanta are certified as minority/female firms in 112 different areas, according to the mayor’s office. This is in addition to federal and state affirmative action programs. “We take minority rights in Atlanta very seriously,” a spokesperson for the city’s Office of Contract Compliance remarked. “The set-aside program here was one of the first in the nation, dating back to the 1970s.”



*The Atlanta Police Department conducts a special outreach program on crime prevention measures for new immigrants.*

## The Problems of Progress

Although Atlanta is clearly a city that works and in which overall living standards are rising, it is not without problems, some of them a direct result of its success.

A major problem, common to many U.S. cities, is the flight of the middle class—both black and white—to the suburbs in pursuit of a better quality of life and better local services. The city's loss of middle-class residents has resulted in a two-pronged income distribution with large numbers of low-income residents and a minority of relatively affluent residents. According to Research Atlanta, Inc., the city has a smaller percentage of households with incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 than any other large U.S. city except Miami and New Orleans.

Inner city poverty is a problem that has preoccupied many of the city's mayors in recent years. It centers largely on the city's African American population on the western and southern side of the city, but also includes some new immigrants. Two years ago, current Mayor Bill Campbell, who is African American, re-convened the Atlanta Summit Against Poverty, which was initiated by former Mayor Maynard Jackson. But despite many initiatives by the city government and other organizations, the problem remains stubbornly intractable.

One trend that may help is the increasing tendency of major corporations here to eliminate suburban office locations in favor of consolidation of employment at their in-city locations. Bell South, for example, a communications giant which has 100 office locations in the

metro area, recently announced it is closing 75 outlying locations and consolidating operations within city boundaries.

“As we approach a new millennium, we must have a combined approach that works for everyone,” says Campbell. “We must work long and hard to combine our talents, energy and resources to break the cycle of poverty and create a better quality of life for every Atlantan.” Sources in the mayor’s office say he realizes that it is not just a question of attacking the causes of inner-city poverty head on, but also improving city services—especially schools—to lure more middle-class residents living in the suburbs back into the city.

For the Campbell administration, as for governments at all levels elsewhere, governing must be a careful balancing act—responding to voters who have competing needs as well as the demands of special interests, such as business and labor. In this regard, taxes are a key issue. Local governments in the United States have taxing authority. Atlanta’s quandary is common to many U.S. cities—how to set local taxes high enough to pay for programs for people who need them, but low enough for people who don’t, many of whom feel they already pay too much compared to their counterparts outside the city limits.

In addition to the uneven pattern of economic progress, the area also is tackling infrastructure problems that, if not surmounted, may hinder further development. According to the *Washington Post*, residents of burgeoning Atlanta spend more time in their cars than anywhere else in America, including Los Angeles. Each day, the newspaper reported the average metro-Atlantan drives 34 miles to get to work

along crowded and congested freeways that have been getting worse.

A major cause of the problem, according to some observers, has been inadequate coordination among the 10 counties in the region and the city government, which is located in Fulton County. The infrastructure issue, perhaps more than any other, illustrates that local governments in modern societies cannot act in isolation, but must carefully coordinate with elected officials from adjacent jurisdictions.

### Partnership with Regional, State and Federal Authorities

In the Atlanta area, the focal point of inter-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination is the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), which together with its predecessor agencies, has tackled planning efforts in the area since 1947 when Atlanta leaders created the first publicly supported, multi-county planning agency in the nation.

ARC provides a forum “where elected and appointed officials from these local governments, along with other community leaders, come together to address mutual challenges and opportunities,” says Wayne Hill, ARC chairman. “With input from the community, the commission sets policies and resolves issues of regionwide consequence,” he adds. The situation confronting new immigrants is such an issue since they live and work throughout the area, not just in the city. For example, DeKalb County, east of Atlanta, is particularly popular with new immigrants.

In addition to being a primary player on the ARC, the city also maintains a relationship with the state and federal government as well,

particularly to take advantage of programs and grants they offer that might benefit Atlantans. For example, the city lobbied the federal government to be designated an Empowerment Zone. It was one of only six cities in the nation to be selected, which won Atlanta \$250 million in grants and tax incentives. New housing and jobs are being created in the zoned, mostly poor, neighborhoods of the city.

Atlanta also has received a federal grant worth almost \$13 million for community policing programs. In order to obtain a grant, a city usually is required to meet prescribed standards, and audits are conducted to ensure federal funds are spent as intended.

Speaking in January in his 1999 state of the city address, Mayor Campbell laid particular emphasis on the city's partnerships not only with other levels of government, but also NGOs. Atlanta has sought "to forge partnerships with every member of the Atlanta community, the city council, city employees, the private sector, the teachers, the unions, the clergy, the non-profits, the neighborhoods, regional leaders, and also those agencies in the state and Washington that make a difference locally," he said.

One such partnership is the recently-formed Atlanta Advisory Committee on Technology and Communications, a group that brings together experts from business, academia and the technology community. The purpose: to make local government smarter, particularly in the delivery of services, and to ensure that all Atlantans, including public school students, have access to technology. "Other than the civil rights movement, there is no more fundamental change in society than that which

technology can and will bring about," Campbell says. "It can be the greatest equalizer that we have known."

### A Vibrant Local Media

As in many cities, the most important local media in Atlanta are the affiliates of the four major commercial broadcast networks, which have extensive local news operations, and the city—and state's—major newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (which puts out two editions on weekdays), a progressive publication with a massive circulation of 1.5 million that has a long reputation for coverage of minority communities and promoting community cohesion.

Elected local officials in Atlanta, like their national counterparts, complain about the media, but an alert and active free press helps bring problems to the attention of the public and politicians, and helps build a consensus for action.

But occasionally, locally elected officials concede that the media's reporting of problems can be a plus. There has been at least one benefit from press reporting on freeway congestion, for example. According to city officials, middle-class suburbanites, tired of long commutes, are beginning to move back to the city where congestion is not as bad, partly because of MARTA, the city's mass transit system.

Don Melvin, a reporter at the *Journal-Constitution*, says local elected officials have to be concerned about what the media is reporting because of its influence with the public. The issues, pro and con, are covered as well as

scandals and abuses that may occur. “Our role is essentially that of a watchdog,” he adds.

Melvin, who has authored a number of stories of interest to new immigrants including a recent page one story on Nigeria, says the *Journal-Constitution* has featured “extensive coverage” of the newcomers. “We try very hard to paint an evolving portrait of the city, perhaps more than newspapers elsewhere,” he adds.

In addition to the *Journal-Constitution*, there are now a number of local newspapers specifically aimed at new immigrants, such as *Mundo Hispanico* and *Neyia*, which report local news of interest as well as international developments in their countries of origin. A growing number of radio stations also cater to the newcomers.

### Making Diversity Work

Atlanta is a case study in how a modern city can make diversity work. An aggressive, progressive independent local media is clearly one ingredient. But key is the commitment of the city, local governments in adjacent jurisdictions, and business and other groups—particularly NGOs—in fostering economic growth, a good quality of life, a high degree of safety and a welcoming attitude to newcomers.

The city’s major problem, an urban underclass that has insufficiently enjoyed the fruits of economic success, is self evidently not unique to Atlanta. How to solve it is a topic of much debate here as well as elsewhere in the United States.

Talk to new immigrants in Atlanta about all of this and chances are a few will offer detailed viewpoints. “I don’t take a lot of interest in all

the issues, partly because business is booming and I’m very busy,” says Irina Levotov, who came here from Russia and sells real estate, mostly to other Russians. “But I love living here. It’s a great place and people get along.”

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## The Atlanta Government

The Atlanta city government, like that in other U.S. cities, is divided into three bodies: the executive, legislative and judicial branches. Each authority acts as a check and balance on the other, in a similar way to government at the state and federal levels.

The Atlanta mayor serves as the chief executive and runs the government departments. The council serves as the local legislature. It is made up of 12 members elected by district, and six members elected at large. The president of the city council presides at all meetings of the council and votes in case of a tie. He also appoints chairs and members of the various committees, where the real work of putting together legislation—called ordinances and resolutions—takes place. His decisions can be changed by a majority of the council. Both the mayor and city council members are elected to four-year terms.

Citizens of Atlanta have an opportunity to appear before the council committees and express their views about proposed legislation. In some cases, the council is required by law to hold public hearings and must notify the public of such hearings before legislation can be finalized. As is commonplace in many other jurisdictions in the United States, the mayor can either approve or veto legislation. If vetoed, the council can override, but only with a two-thirds vote.

Before 1974, all council members were elected at large in Atlanta. That is still the case in some U.S. cities. The proponents of at least a number of seats on local councils being set aside to represent districts, rather than having all seats at large, argue the system is preferable in two important respects: one, it fosters better constituency service; and, two, it promotes minority representation in cases where a particular group may be a minority in the city as a whole, but not in a particular district.

On the judicial side, just as laws passed at the federal level are sometimes overturned by the federal courts on constitutional grounds, actions taken by local and state executives, and legislatures also are subject to review by local and state courts.

The Atlanta Regional Commission, the body responsible for a coordinated approach to problems and issues in the Atlanta metro area, includes representatives from all the jurisdictions in the vicinity, including the mayor of Atlanta, each county commission chairman in the region, 15 private citizens, and one nonvoting member from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, a state agency.

# Marketing Cities for Development

One of the most important aspects of promoting a city is in making it attractive to businesses and as a haven for tourists. In this discussion between one current and two former mayors, we look at how three U.S. cities market themselves. First up, Emanuel Cleaver II, the outgoing mayor of Kansas City, Missouri, and Gene Roberts, the former mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee, talk about the pluses and minuses of promoting a city in a highly competitive market. And later, Art Agnos, the former mayor of San Francisco, California, discusses marketing a city as a tourist attraction. Contributing Editor Susan Cleary serves as moderator.

**Moderator.** Today, there's so much talk about the global economy and high business mobility. Mayor Cleaver, do you feel, as a mayor of a large city, under more pressure to play an active role in marketing your city?

**Mayor Cleaver.** With regard to bringing businesses to town...we sell our central location.... Being in the Midwest, you actually have greater access to both coasts in terms of the availability of staff during working hours. We found that that's a big deal to companies. Many of them hadn't even thought about the time aspect....

We also decided that it's important for us to market our history, which most people don't know about. So we market the fact that this is former CBS newsman Walter Cronkite's hometown. This is Walt Disney's hometown. This is the hometown of Hallmark Greeting Cards. Sprint, the telecommunications company, also started here. We try to use the things that people would know about.

And we found that when you compare the cost of housing in Kansas City to most of the

major cities in the United States, we are far, far less expensive.

**Moderator.** It's interesting to look at what your advantages are as a city. For example, I noticed that your slogan in Kansas City is "City of Fountains, Heart of the Nation." How did you start that process?

**Mayor Cleaver.** We had to look at what we felt we had that other cities didn't have. For example, we have more fountains in Kansas City than any city in the world except Rome. So our city logo now is "The Fountain...." We thought the best way to market that was to put it into our slogan and into our city logo....

**Moderator.** Mayor Roberts, I understand that when you were mayor of Chattanooga, you won several awards for environmental management. That also seems to be a good way of highlighting the advantages that a city has. Can you talk about how you have used that recognition?

**Mayor Roberts.** Frankly, the awards gave us a niche: to have been so bad and changed so much in almost three decades. In that time, we've addressed some real problems in the community: air pollution, water pollution, the look of our city. We probably had the worst air pollution in the country in the 1960s. For decades, you couldn't see the city from Lookout Mountain on many days. So we asked ourselves several questions: How do you address the problem of pollution? And how do you put public-private partnerships together? How do you approach the problem of storm-water run-off into the rivers and streams in your city? How do you bring the business community in? All these things, we found, were of a great deal of interest to a lot of cities everywhere.

**Moderator.** Mayor Cleaver, did you find that it makes a difference to a business if you have a pretty downtown or a good environment? Are these quality-of-life issues really a selling point for business?

**Mayor Cleaver.** Yes, they are. The National League of Cities did a study, and we followed up at the local level. We found that corporate executives anywhere in the country live for the most part within 10 miles of their office. If that is the case, then like everyone else, they're going to want to have access to things of beauty. We found that people were very much interested in driving down a boulevard and seeing fountains a few blocks from their home.

**Mayor Roberts.** Let me follow up on that to illustrate that point. We had one company who visited us who looked at things like taxes, infrastructure, incentives. But the representatives also looked at the school system and what kind of graduates we were turning out. And to the cultural arts scene in Chattanooga. So, yes, companies do look at the kinds of things that Mayor Cleaver was talking about just now. More so than most people imagine.

**Moderator.** What kind of organizations do you have in Kansas City, for example, that help a business come up with that information? Do you have other organizations that you feel have been very helpful in providing the kind of information, the kind of facilitator services that businesses need?

**Mayor Cleaver.** The answer is yes. Recently, I flew to New Jersey to make a presentation with our governor to a company that has just purchased Hoechst-Marion-Rousselle, a German pharmaceutical company.... They have a plant here and when the merger is complete, we want them to move to Kansas City. When we went to



New Jersey...we took a video with Don Hall, who is the chairman of the board of Hallmark Cards; Bill Esrey from Sprint and others. In essence, they said, "Our international headquarters are located in Kansas City and we wouldn't move any other place." So while it's not necessarily an organization, we clearly call on the corporate community to help when we are trying to recruit new companies to town.

**Moderator.** What about in Chattanooga—what kind of organizations do you have that will put together a plan to market a city?

**Mayor Roberts.** In 1983, we lost 6,000 good-paying industrial jobs almost overnight. The county executive and I got together and decided that we had a big job to do and we couldn't do it ourselves. So we went to the business community and brought some of the key folks together, cited the problem, asked them to get involved. One of the ways they helped was to create the River City Company. They put up \$10 million—all grants, no loans. Its job was to begin the task of redeveloping our downtown, to bring new restaurants there, to bring new beauty there.

Later, the River City Company evolved into the River Valley Company, which included not just Chattanooga but some of our neighboring cities and counties. And through that apparatus, the city and county, along with the business leadership and some of our neighbors, now contribute money. In fact, they put in more than we do. That's the economic development arm of this city and this region.

**Moderator.** Do you feel, Mayor Cleaver, a growing international profile for Kansas City?

**Mayor Cleaver.** Believe it or not, our professional football team, the Kansas City Chiefs, has

helped in many ways. We played the Minnesota Vikings in Tokyo this past year.... I went over with the team, and I met with business leaders in Tokyo. We found that in this growing global economy, if you can't compete with the other cities, not only around the United States, but in the world, you're going to lose.

In another area, we were designated as the site for the Midwest International Distribution Center. So we are now in the process of trying to develop so that we can become the center for the NAFTA trade route, which runs from Canada through Kansas City down to the State of Jalisco in Mexico.

In fact, in the upcoming mayoral election, that's one of the things that's being discussed. Who can get us more connected with the world economically?.... More and more, you're going to find U.S. cities trying to reach out to foreign markets and trying to get some of those markets established in their cities.

**Moderator.** Does Chattanooga feel that same pressure—that same competitive urging?

**Mayor Roberts.** Yes, but we have to do it in a different way from Mayor Cleaver. We don't have professional sports in Chattanooga, so we compete at the amateur sports level. We compete for major softball tournaments across the United States, for example. The city, the county and the university recently put their money together with some private funds and built an Olympic-style softball stadium. We just built a new football/soccer stadium for the university and we will bring in the national championship game to Chattanooga. So we do compete at that level in sports. Sports is big business....

**Moderator.** Mayor Cleaver, what marketing tools do you use that any mayor might have available to

him or her? What sort of inexpensive ways does a city go about raising its profile?

**Mayor Cleaver.** By trying to get as many national and international guests to visit the city.... I think giving people the opportunity to come into your city as opposed to buying \$35 million worth of air time or travelling around the world is a much better idea. The mayor of Diyarbakor (Turkey), for example, has said he will come to Kansas City this spring. I think having people come in is a far less expensive way of getting the word out than trying to go out to give the word.

**Moderator.** What about the Internet? Kansas City does have a lot on the Internet. Is that a tool that you've been involved with?

**Mayor Cleaver.** Yes, that's intentional. We have a lot of information on the Internet and are trying to do even more through the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), which the state government gave us authorization to create. The EDC is the economic arm of our municipal government. I appoint the board, and there is a president to oversee it. Three agencies come under the mantle of the EDC. One is the Port Authority, which has control of the riverfront, the Missouri River. Because we have river boat gaming, the Port Authority becomes a major player. Another agency is the Tax Increment Financing Commission, which uses incremental taxes to help support development. The other agency is Land Plans for Redevelopment.... Any time we have a major development, we have to assemble land, and this agency has the right and the domain to do that.

Then there is a division called Business Retention, where we try to maintain constant contact with all of the businesses in town.

Once a month we have a meeting with a different group of chief executive officers (CEOs) of various companies. We ask them if they have any problems. For instance, "Is the streetlight working? Has the stop sign been fixed?"

**Moderator.** Does Chattanooga have a similar way in which business and local government can interact?

**Mayor Roberts.** Yes, we do all those things that Mayor Cleaver mentioned in Kansas City: tax increment financing, various kinds of incentives. We do a lot of work on the river.... But we don't have gambling, so we don't get into that aspect of it. But other than that, we do all those kinds of things to bring business to the city.

**Moderator.** Have either of you been involved in any international organizations that get mayors together?

**Mayor Cleaver.** Yes, we have the I-35 Corridor Coalition (named for the interstate highway that runs through Kansas City), and we meet twice a year. The mayors come all the way from Winnipeg, Canada, down to Guadalajara, Mexico. We are trying to become the NAFTA corridor, to take advantage of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

*Editor's Note: Mayor Art Agnos joins the discussion at this point.*

**Moderator.** We've talked a little bit about how you market your city to business, but we really haven't talked about tourism, which in itself, is a big industry. Is it also a way of attracting attention of potential investors?

**Mayor Agnos.** Absolutely! We started doing something in San Francisco back in 1988 when I first started learning about sister-city relationships—the notion of doing more than just cultural and business exchanges, but also offering discount and higher priority to visitors, to business people that were from a sister city. You treat them like a member of a family.... The sister-city relationship gives you a head start. In San Francisco, for example, we worked out a discount for a number of hotels for travelers that came from our sister cities. We also developed a visitor's pass for tourist attractions where sister-city visitors got a discount.

**Moderator.** Sometimes, it's visitors that point out interesting things about a city you might not have noticed. How do you comb your city for ideas on new ways to look at it or new ways to present what you have?

**Mayor Agnos.** Our Convention and Visitor's Bureau does some of that. They also do follow-ups with visitors, where they talk to tourists to see what appeals to them, what doesn't appeal to them. The Convention and Visitor's Bureau is able to fund the research through the visitors' tax, the hotel tax, etc. And they perform those kinds of services, as well as their primary function, which is to seek and develop convention business for the city. Like any business, you're constantly trying to keep up with the customer.

**Moderator.** In San Francisco, does the city government work with the Convention and Visitor's Bureau to bring in businesses?

**Mayor Agnos.** Oh, absolutely. I'm a salesman for the city in that regard. I remember after the earthquake in 1988, one of the first things I was doing—in addition to making sure the city was

getting what it needed to restore itself—was phoning organizations who were thinking of pulling out their conventions, reassuring them that the city was ready to receive them and that they would have a successful business visit with their convention.

And of course, every mayor goes out with the Convention and Visitor's Bureau to give presentations on the city.

**Moderator.** Are the presentations something that's put together exclusively by the mayor's office?

**Mayor Agnos.** They're done together. The Convention and Visitor's Bureau tells you who your market is, and you speak to them as a representative of the city. After all, you know how to sell your city and so, you incorporate what ideas you want to emphasize.

**Moderator.** Mayor Agnos, do you have any tips for mayors on getting media attention for a city? San Francisco is so well-known, you might not need to do that.

**Mayor Agnos.** It's a lot easier here than it is in some other places. But every city has its attractions. It's just a matter of working hard to sell it.

**Moderator.** Well, I think our time is up. Thanks, everyone.

# Lessons for Local Government in the 21st Century

by Bruce Adams

Bruce Adams, founder and president of A Greater Washington, an alliance of business and community leaders working to strengthen the national capital region, once served as a council member in Montgomery County, Maryland. In this thought-provoking essay on how local government in the United States has evolved over the last two centuries, he looks ahead and gives suggestions for communities everywhere to follow in the new millennium.

IN HIS BOOK, *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville summed up Americans in the following way: “In a local community, a citizen may conceive of some need that is not being met. What does he do? He goes across the street and discusses it with his neighbor. A committee begins functioning on behalf of that need.... All of this is done by private citizens on their own initiative.”

One hundred sixty-four years later, this ability that Tocqueville heralded, the distinctive American way of “rolling up our sleeves” and solving the problem, is still the most admirable aspect of our American experiment with democracy. And it still serves as a tremendous incentive at the grassroots level.

Despite the tendency toward negativism by the media and the public, the American “can-do” spirit has survived and flourishes today in many communities across the United States. One might take issue with Tocqueville’s assessment, however, when reading the newspaper or



*Bruce Adams*

watching the nightly news. In those instances, an observer might conclude that nobody in the United States cares and few are even trying to make a difference.

“But you’d be wrong,” says John W. Gardner, the founder of Common Cause, a non-profit, nonpartisan citizen’s lobbying organization that promotes open, honest and accountable government. “There are new signs of vitality all across America. There are many people working hard for the public good in every community in this nation,” he continues. “And in some places, there are enough of these people to have reached a critical mass and changed the political culture of their communities.”

### Rethinking Citizen Participation

With certain limited exceptions, U.S. citizens have access to public documents and a right to testify at public hearings on significant legislative and budget decisions. Public officials call

for public hearings on a regular basis—with citizen participation encouraged—in order to conduct meetings on the business of the community. Many local government legislative sessions are covered live on cable television. These formal aspects of local government guarantee the access and openness that are at the core of our democratic system, yet, in some ways, they have become problematic.

Public hearings promote an oversimplification and polarization of issues by interest groups, media and elected officials. There is usually a solution put on the table—for instance, a bill or a budget proposal. The people who care most deeply about the issues show up at the hearing, ready to promote their beliefs. That is often the problem. Public hearings in the United States all too often have become battlegrounds for adversaries fighting over their preferred solutions. And in a lot of cases, rather than look at what’s best for the public good, each participant thinks that only his solution will work.

Over and over, I have found that the best way to solve a problem is to brainstorm, that is, to gather a group of people with differing opinions and set them down to come up with a solution with which everyone can agree. Unfortunately, this does not happen often in citizen-government interaction. In a world where the public and media tear into any controversial statement, few elected or appointed officials, as well as citizens themselves, are willing to sit down and talk things over.

And with the advent of such things as television, public opinion polls and the ability to get information around the world instantaneously, our ability to frustrate each other has

increased dramatically. We seem to be running too fast, talking too loud, listening too selectively and thinking too little. As public policy issues have become more complicated, our politics have become simplistic, our problems more intransigent.

The negative aspects of the positive forces that have served the United States well—an open and participatory government, a free press and a skeptical public—suggest the need to rethink our notions of citizen participation.

### Rebuilding Relationships

The goal of democracy is to improve the quality of lives of the people. Building healthy communities is less about government structure and more about building relationships. This crossover of relationship building between boundaries or barriers that previously have been set is the key to breaking political gridlock and thus being able to take action in the public interest.

Our natural tendency is to spend time with people who think and act pretty much the way we do. Relationship building across traditional boundaries is by definition an unnatural act. It has to be learned. It requires constant, hard work. Success occurs in communities where there is communication, coordination and collaborative action by many entities, among them, institutions, organizations, agencies and individuals. On specific issues, successful communities have the ability to see the connections and act on them.

To be able to bring people together on an issue, a leader must make the effort to build trust and credibility with representatives from

all factions and interests. This contrasts with the traditional idea of “heroic leadership.” We want our leaders to be forceful and decisive, and to be in charge. Yet, these traits are at odds with the skills needed by a new type of collaborative leader.

In my days as a councilman, I found myself constantly trying to bring people together outside of the formal public hearing process. Those who disagreed in an open forum, often would find they had more in common in a neutral setting. Instead of conflict, they crafted a win-win solution. These informal efforts provided me with hope that we might be able to refashion our democratic processes to fit the needs of our times.

The challenge for the next century, then, is to reinvent democracy for modern times while honoring the essential elements of an informed and involved citizenry. The question that should be asked is: Can we fashion a process where we talk through issues with each other rather than at each other?

### Illustrations of Leadership

In *Boundary Crossers: Community Leadership for a Global Age*, Neal Peirce and Curtis Johnson describe the complex leadership challenges that face communities as they enter the 21st century. From their study of successful regions around the United States, Peirce and Johnson found illustrations of leadership from outside of government. An examination of the regions studied provides glimpses into how communities will need to operate in order to be successful in the next century.

In 1969, for example, the federal government announced that Chattanooga, Tennessee, had the foulest air in America. Fast-forward to 1996, when the United Nations recognized Chattanooga as one of the worlds' dozen-most sustainable cities. In that 33-year interim, the city created "Vision 2000," involving 1,700 citizens helping to shape a new future. The clean-up of air pollution was just one aspect of the Vision 2000 program.

In Cleveland, Ohio, talented professionals working in intermediary roles in NGOs, foundations, community development corporations and city planning agencies have built networks of trusting relationships across the barriers of sector and race.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, the newspaper, the *Charlotte Observer*, in partnership with three local radio stations serving African American neighborhoods, launched a community journalism initiative called "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods." Community journalism seeks to report the news in ways that help engage the public in community life.

### Ten Lessons for Community Builders

From Peirce and Johnson's study, we can determine that it is unrealistic to expect elected officials to take the lead in reinventing democracy. The burden for taking the lead toward a new, citizen-based collaborative effort must rest largely with private citizens. Taking that into consideration, Peirce and Johnson have developed 10 important lessons for 21st-century community builders:

*Lesson 1* The table gets larger—and rounder. The old-style top-down management style doesn't work anymore. We are in a transition to a new leadership culture where citizens insist on having a place at the table. Thus, the table gets larger and rounder, with enough space for everyone who wants to participate.

*Lesson 2* The only thing more challenging than a crisis may be its absence. Complacency may lead to unattended problems. Smart regions solve problems before they loom large.

*Lesson 3* The agenda gets tougher. Revitalization of downtown areas is easy compared to such issues as improving the lives of people caught in cycles of poverty and hopelessness.

*Lesson 4* There is no magical leadership structure—just people and relationships. More than governance structure, it is relationships between people that get things done.

*Lesson 5* No one's excused. Universities, professionals, religious communities and the media are top candidates to enrich the community-leadership mix.

*Lesson 6* Sometimes the old ways still work. Individual leaders still can make things happen. Respect and welcome civic-minded leaders who can make a difference.

*Lesson 7* Collaboration is messy, frustrating and indispensable. Today, cities and regions are fumbling toward collaboration, making mistakes, but beginning to form new, inclusive institutions that can solve problems and strengthen communities.

*Lesson 8* Government always needs reforming, but all the reforms need government.

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Governments are playing new roles as civic bridge-builders. In all its myriad forms and despite all its inefficiencies and shortcomings, government is still an essential partner for real, lasting, long-term change.

*Lesson 9* Communities matter. Despite the rapid development and acceptance of the Internet, communities still matter. Those communities that matter the most are regions, center cities and neighborhoods.

*Lesson 10* It's never over. No success is ever final. No community, no matter how successful, can ever rest on its accomplishments.

### Learning to Work Together

Restoring hope and building stronger communities takes a lot more than talk. Traditional public hearings won't take us where we need to go. Rather, it will take civic will and hard work. Learning to work together across the boundaries and barriers that divide us is the essential leadership task of the 21st century.

Community building is not a passive activity. The democratic process guarantees that we all will have the capacity to make a contribution to the leadership of our communities. The challenges before us necessitate that individual citizens get involved and make that contribution.



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## Internet Sites on Democratic Local Government

Please note that USIA assumes no responsibility for the content and availability of those non-USIA resources listed below, which reside solely with the providers:

### **Alliance for National Renewal (ANR)**

<http://www.ncl.org/anr/>

The Alliance for National Renewal (ANR) is a coalition of over 200 national and local organizations dedicated to the principles of community renewal.

### **Alliance for Redesigning Government**

<http://www.alliance.napawash.org/alliance/index.html>

The Alliance for Redesigning Government is the center of a national network and clearinghouse for state, local and federal innovators; nonprofit and corporate leaders; and scholars who advocate performance-based, results-driven governance.

### **Asset-Based Community Development Institute**

<http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html#A>

Established at Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research, Asset-Based Community

Development Institute has been the basis for the production of resources and tools for community builders, helping them identify, nurture and mobilize neighborhood assets.

### **Center for Creative Leadership**

<http://www.ccl.org/>

An international, nonprofit educational institution, the Center for Creative Leadership develops models of managerial practice.

### **The Change Project: Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities**

[http://www.well.com/user/bbear/hc\\_articles.html](http://www.well.com/user/bbear/hc_articles.html)

Articles on building healthy cities and communities.

### **The Citistates Group**

<http://www.citistates.com/>

The Citistates Group is a network of journalists, speakers and consultants who believe that successful metropolitan regions are today's key to economic competitiveness and sustainable communities.

### **Civic Practices Network (CPN)**

<http://www.cpn.org/>

CPN is a collaborative and nonpartisan project dedicated to bringing practical tools for public problem solving into community and institutional settings across America, by developing new approaches that enhance citizens' roles in active public problem solving and responsible democratic deliberation.

### **CivicSource HomePage**

<http://civicsource.org>

CivicSource seeks to serve the public/civic leadership community by linking individuals, communities, businesses, organizations, scholars and programs with the resources to meet the needs of a new century of civic activism and "transforming leadership."

### **Common Cause**

<http://www.commoncause.org/>

Common Cause is a nonprofit, nonpartisan citizen's lobbying organization promoting open, honest and accountable government.

### **Institute of Government**

<http://ncinfo.iog.unc.edu/>

The Institute of Government, based at the University of North Carolina, is the largest and most diversified university-based local government training, consulting and research organization in the United States.

### **The International City/County Management Association (ICMA)**

<http://www.icma.org/>

ICMA represents appointed managers and administrators in local governments throughout the world.

### **International Local Government Homepage**

<http://world.localgov.org/>

A collection of community web pages from local governments around the world.

### **Library of Congress' State and Local Government Websites**

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/global/state/stategov.html>

The Library of Congress' Internet Resource page for state and local government websites.

### **Local Government Institute (LGI)**

<http://www.lgi.org/>

An independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of local government.

### **National Association for Community Leadership**

<http://www.communityleadership.org/>

The National Association for Community Leadership is a nonprofit organization dedicated to nurturing leadership in communities throughout the United States and internationally.

### **The National Association of Counties (NACo)**

<http://www.naco.org/>

NACo acts as a liaison with other levels of government, works to improve public understanding of counties, serves as a national advocate for counties and provides them with resources to help them find innovative methods to meet the challenges they face.

### **National Civic League (NCL)**

<http://www.ncl.org/ncl/index.htm>

National Civic League's mission is to strengthen citizen democracy by transforming democratic institutions, by working directly with communities to foster cross-sector collaboration and grassroots problem solving.

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**The National Community Building Network**

<http://www.ncbn.org/welcome.shtml>

The National Community Building Network is an alliance of locally driven urban initiatives working to reduce poverty and create social and economic opportunity through comprehensive community-building strategies.

**National Conference of State Legislatures**

<http://www.ncsl.org/index.htm>

The National Conference of State Legislatures consists of comprehensive information, research on critical state issues, informative publications, provocative meetings and seminars, an unparalleled legislative information database, a voice in Washington, D.C., and an expert staff to assist legislators and staff in solving difficult problems.

**National League of Cities (NLC)**

<http://www.nlc.org/>

The National League of Cities is the country's largest and most representative organization serving municipal governments. Through NLC, mayors and city council members join together to establish unified policy positions, advocate these policies forcefully and share information that strengthens municipal government throughout the nation.

**Pew Partnership**

<http://www.pew-partnership.org/>

The Pew Partnership is a civic research organization whose mission is to document and disseminate cutting-edge community solutions. The Partnership collaborates with local and national partners to empower diverse leadership for action, catalyze broad-based community partnerships to solve problems and research successful community solutions and civic practices.

**Sister Cities, International**

<http://www.sister-cities.org/>

The national membership organization for sister city, county and state programs in the United States. Sister Cities International is the official agency which links communities from the United States with communities worldwide.

**U.S. Conference of Mayors**

<http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/>

The United States Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are about 1,050 such cities in the United States today. Conference of Mayors members speak with a united voice on matters pertaining to organizational policies and goals. Individually, each member-mayor contributes to development of national urban policy through service on one or more of the organization's 10 standing committees.

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