

## Editor's Note

# Local Government Officials— Making the Wheels Turn

by Bill Finger

**W**hen you get up in the morning, do you think about how good a job your municipal or county officials are doing? Sounds like a crazy question, doesn't it? Burning the toast, packing the kids' lunch, or getting to work on time rules the morning hours in most households. But try it just once. Run through your and your family's routine. How important are *local* government officials for the quality of your life?

To tick off just a few possible elements of your daily schedule:

\* Brushing your teeth and flushing the toilet—Did the county and city officials ever work out the dispute over the new reservoir and sewage lines?

\* Riding the bus or car—Has the municipal maintenance crew kept the streets clear of Boston-style potholes?

\* Taking out the garbage—Is the extra assessment (read the fine print on your water bill) worth the backyard service?

\* School day—Did the county commissioners vote enough money to the school board? Did the school board close the neighborhood school?

\* Accident or fire—How professional were the police and fire officials?

\* Watching T.V.—Did the channel fuzz out on the cable just as Bogart finally embraced Bacall?

Water, sewer, garbage, schools, police, fire, zoning, cable television, economic opportunities, welfare, parking, libraries, swimming pools. The basics of life, in many cases, depend not upon a bureaucrat in Washington or Raleigh but upon good leadership and execution in the county courthouse or city hall. Certainly, funds and

regulations come from Raleigh and Washington. But local officials deliver many of the everyday services which none of us would like to do without.

In North Carolina, there are 879 units of general purpose local government—100 counties, 513 municipalities, and 266 special districts. All are creatures of the state. "The General Assembly shall provide for the organization and government and the fixing of boundaries of counties, cities and towns, and other governmental subdivisions," reads Article VII, Section 1 of the N.C. Constitution. While beholden to the legislature for their existence, these local governments deliver the services. Consequently, a great deal of pride and possessiveness over local government functions has evolved.

Many think North Carolina could do with fewer local governments. "I commend to your serious consideration the mandatory consolidation of some counties," Gov. O. Max Gardner told the 1931 General Assembly, the historic legislative session that rescued local governments from financial disaster (see page 6). "The beneficial experience gained by such enforced legislation will, I believe, pave the way for further

consolidations at future sessions of the General Assembly."

In this case, Gardner misjudged the future. A politically charged issue, consolidation of local governments has hardly advanced past the thinking stage. Several efforts at municipal-county consolidation have been defeated (in Asheville/Buncombe County, Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, and other areas). But an increased sharing of governmental services—from water and sewer lines to libraries and parks—has again brought the idea of consolidation into the forefront. Only recently Mecklenburg County and Charlotte, which already administer numerous services jointly, have again begun to consider merger.

"Functional consolidation is definitely increasing," says Ron Aycock, director of the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, in an interview that begins the "county" section of this issue of *North Carolina Insight*. "People will wake up one morning and wonder where the separate services from a city and county went. Then we might have consolidation, but I won't predict how long it will take."

S. Leigh Wilson, director of the N.C. League

**Table 1. Chief Functions and Services Authorized for City and County Governments in North Carolina\***

**A. Services and Functions Authorized for Counties Only**

- |                           |                             |                                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Forest protection      | 6. Drainage                 | 11. Public schools              |
| 2. Agricultural extension | 7. Juvenile detention homes | 12. Railroad revitalization     |
| 3. Community colleges     | 8. Medical examiner/coroner | 13. Register of deeds           |
| 4. County home            | 9. Mental health            | 14. Social services             |
| 5. County surveyor        | 10. Public health           | 15. Soil and water conservation |

**B. Services and Functions Authorized for Both Cities and Counties**

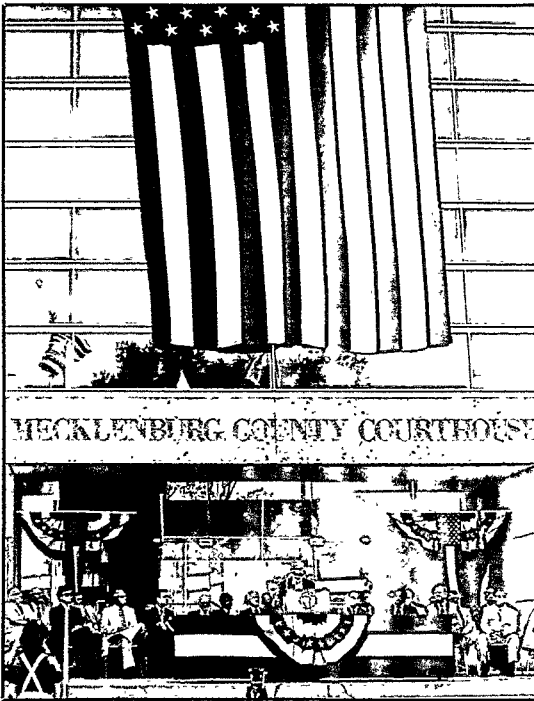
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|---|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Air pollution control                        | 15. Drug abuse programs   | 29. Parks                               |
| 2. Airports                                     | 16. Fire protection       | 30. Planning                            |
| 3. Alcoholic rehabilitation                     | 17. Historic preservation | 31. Ports and harbors                   |
| 4. Ambulance services                           | 18. Hospitals             | 32. Public housing                      |
| 5. Animal shelters                              | 19. Human relations       | 33. Recreation                          |
| 6. Armories                                     | 20. Industrial promotion  | 34. Rescue squads                       |
| 7. Art galleries and museums                    | 21. Inspection            | 35. Senior citizens programs            |
| 8. Auditoriums; coliseums                       | 22. Jails                 | 36. Sewerage                            |
| 9. Beach erosion control & hurricane protection | 23. Law enforcement       | 37. Solid waste collection and disposal |
| 10. Bus lines; public transp. systems           | 24. Libraries             | 38. Urban redevelopment                 |
| 11. Civil defense                               | 25. Manpower              | 39. Veterans services                   |
| 12. Community appearance                        | 26. National guard        | 40. Water                               |
| 13. Community action                            | 27. Off-street parking    | 41. Watershed improvement               |
| 14. Community development                       | 28. Open space            |   |

**C. Services and Functions Authorized for Cities Only**

- |                      |                   |                        |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Cable television* | 4. Gas systems    | 7. Street lighting     |
| 2. Cemeteries        | 5. Sidewalks      | 8. Streets             |
| 3. Electric systems  | 6. Storm drainage | 9. Traffic engineering |

\*Both units have authority to undertake the necessary supporting functions and activities: finance, tax collection., personnel, purchasing, etc. and to construct buildings and other facilities necessary to provide the listed services. The authority cited in the above list is qualified in some cases. And in some cases one unit's action may limit the other's. The list does not include regulatory or franchising authority. For example, counties offer franchises for cable but cannot own or operate cable systems directly.

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Courtesy Mecklenburg County

of Municipalities, echoes Aycock in the interview beginning the “municipal” section. “The joint services approach is not very dramatic, and it’s not happening overnight. It’s being worked out sometimes with gnashing of teeth, but it eventually will make it possible again to bring up the question of consolidation of units of government.”

Political consolidation or not, local governments still have the job of delivering basic services to over six million North Carolinians. Table 1 shows the various services that counties, municipalities, and both of these governmental units can undertake. Table 2 lists the most important federal laws affecting these services. News coverage of any of these issues usually focuses on actions taken at a city council or county commissioners meeting. In addition, policy papers and reports on such issues as water resources and school finance are examining interactions among local government units.

This issue of *Insight* views the demands facing local government officials through the prism of intergovernmental relations. Specifically, this edition examines how *state government* in North Carolina addresses *local government* concerns, particularly long-term concerns. Diversity highlights the distance from Manteo to

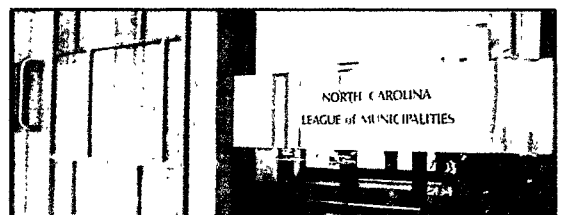
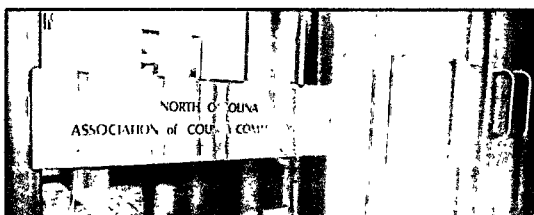
Mecklenburg, from Raleigh to Rowan. But there is also a certain predictability throughout North Carolina as well—in roads and schools, in taxes and water, in law enforcement and fire protection. How has state government contributed to this predictability? How should it nurture the diversity?

No single magazine issue could examine the state role in all the areas of responsibility listed in Table 1. Past *Insight* issues have from time to time examined issues that affect local government officials in a major way, from annexation to community development block grants. Likewise, future articles are scheduled on regional government and private-sector involvement in the economic development efforts of local governments.

In this issue, we highlight some of the most pressing issues facing local officials—school finance, water and sewer needs, and deinstitutionalization in human services. Even these three articles (in which we invested many pages) can only suggest the many policy nuances that lie very close to the surface. In choosing other articles—the interviews with Aycock and Wilson, the two articles on surveys, and the summaries of state assistance to local officials and of funding formulas—we sought to present material that would be useful to government officials and analysts in almost any specific local government issue.

With the three-part structure to the issue, we attempt to provide an ongoing framework for viewing local government issues. The first section relates to both counties and municipalities. The county and municipal sections focus on issues of particular concern to those respective units of government, even in an era of increased blurring of services among various governments.

One day, perhaps you will look beyond the breakfast rush and the daily routine to the source of the services that most of us take for granted. After reading this issue of *Insight*, we don’t expect you to recall all 18 footnotes to the school finance article or retain all 14 categories of special general purpose government districts. But we do hope that this issue of *Insight* will help you understand why policy decisions at the state level affect virtually every aspect of your everyday life—even as those laboring in city halls and county courthouses must make the wheels turn. □



Michael Matros

**Table 2. Major Federal Statutes Regulating State and Local Governments**

Title	Objective	Public Law
Age Discrimination in Employment Act (1974) <sup>1</sup>	Prevent discrimination on the basis of age in state and local government employment.	93-259; 90-202
Architectural Barriers Act of 1968	Make federally occupied and funded buildings, facilities and public conveyances accessible to the physically handicapped.	90-480
Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI)	Prevent discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in federally assisted programs.	88-352
Civil Rights Act of 1968 (Title VIII)	Prevent discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in the sale or rental of federally assisted housing.	90-284
Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970	Establish national air quality and emissions standards.	91-604
Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972	Assure that federally assisted activities are consistent with federally approved state coastal zone management programs.	94-370
Davis-Bacon Act (1931) <sup>2</sup>	Assure that locally prevailing wages are paid to construction workers employed under federal contracts and financial assistance programs.	74-403
Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX)	Prevent discrimination on the basis of sex in federally assisted education programs.	92-318
Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975)	Provide a free appropriate public education to all handicapped children.	94-142
Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972	Prevent discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in state and local government employment.	92-261
Fair Labor Standards Act Amendments of 1974	Extend federal minimum wage and overtime pay protections to state and local government employees. <sup>3</sup>	93-259
Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974	Provide student and parental access to educational records while restricting access by others.	93-380
Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (1972)	Control the use of pesticides that may be harmful to the environment.	92-516
Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972	Establish federal effluent limitations to control the discharge of pollutants.	92-500
Flood Disaster Protection Act of 1973	Expand coverage of the national flood insurance program.	93-234
Highway Beautification Act of 1965	Control and remove outdoor advertising signs along major highways.	89-285
Marine Protection Research and Sanctuaries Act Amendments of 1977	Prohibit ocean dumping of municipal sludge.	95-153
National Energy Conservation Policy Act (1978)	Establish residential energy conservation plans.	95-619
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969	Assure consideration of the environmental impact of major federal actions.	91-190
National Health Planning and Resources Development Act of 1974	Establish state and local health planning agencies and procedures.	93-64
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966	Protect properties of historical, architectural, archaeological and cultural significance.	89-665
Occupational Safety and Health Act (1970)	Eliminate unsafe and unhealthful working conditions.	91-596
Public Utilities Regulatory Policies Act of 1978	Require consideration of federal standards for the pricing of electricity and natural gas.	95-617
Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504)	Prevent discrimination against otherwise qualified individuals on the basis of physical or mental handicap in federally assisted programs.	93-112
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976	Establish standards for the control of hazardous wastes.	94-580
Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974	Assure drinking water purity.	93-523
Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977	Establish federal standards for the control of surface mining.	95-87
Water Quality Act (1965)	Establish federal water quality standards for interstate waters.	88-668
Wholesome Poultry Products Act of 1968	Establish systems for the inspection of poultry sold in intrastate commerce.	90-492

<sup>1</sup>Coverage of the act, originally adopted in 1967, was extended to state and local government employees in 1974.

<sup>2</sup>Although the *Davis-Bacon Act* applied initially only to direct federal construction, it has since been extended to some 77 federal assistance programs.

<sup>3</sup>Application was restricted by the Supreme Court in *National League of Cities v. Usery*, 426 U.S. 833 (1976).

Reprinted from *Regulatory Federalism: Policy, Process, Impact and Reform*, Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, Washington, 1984.