From: Rose Williams, NC League of Municipalities
To: Rep. Mike Clampitt
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Legislative Bulletin

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The Weekly Recap

WHAT HAPPENED: While the news from Capitol Hill received marquee attention, our radar picked up plenty of developments on the North Carolina level of interest to cities and towns.

WHAT IT MEANS: Our position on the immediate need for better internet connections in communities around the state resurfaced in the newspapers. A state commission tasked with finding new solutions for transportation funding issued its final report. A longtime

member of the League's legal team received the highest of honors. And the COVID-19 picture worsened.

ON TAP: The N.C. General Assembly is scheduled to start its new biennium next week with the seating of new members, swearings-in and other ceremonial kickoffs. And with it, the League is on track to finalize its selection of legislative goals for the biennium. Members, don't miss the piece that follows in this Bulletin on your participation in that process. We have an open-house coming right up on the subject.

THE SKINNY: There's been no shortage of dynamics in government news in the crossover to 2021. Thank you for your diligent attention and involvement as we work together for the best outcomes.

NCLM Advocacy Goals Open House Jan. 12

sossamon

Sylva Mayor Lynda Sossamon, photographed here in 2019, is a NCLM Legislative Policy co-chair. Photo by Ben Brown.

Ahead of our crucial vote next week, member cities and towns are encouraged to join the League for an Advocacy Goals Open House on Tuesday, Jan. 12 to discuss proposed legislative priorities. This event, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m., is designed to help members in their consideration of the 17 possible advocacy goals. This follows impressive participation to date in the process, as we've received more than 450 ideas from 165 individuals representing 114 municipalities.

NCLM Legislative Policy Committee co-chairs Kings Mountain Mayor Scott Neisler and Sylva Mayor Lynda Sossamon will host this open house accompanied by NCLM's Government Affairs staff. This event will take place on Zoom. No registration is required. A separate email with login details went out earlier today.

The open house is an opportunity to gain clarity on any of the proposed priorities. Please note that this session will be strictly informational, as debate on these proposals has concluded. Voting ends Friday, Jan. 15. The goals determined through this vote will guide the League's legislative advocacy for the next two years.

'N.C. Can't Wait for Broadband Solutions'; Meyer Op-Ed in Newspapers

Appearing first in our own Southern City Magazine, an op-ed from League Executive Director Paul Meyer advocating for the FIBER NC Act, a League-supported proposal that would give local governments flexibility to partner with private providers to connect underserved areas with high-speed Internet, has been published in newspapers in **Fayetteville**, Laurinburg, and more.

The proposal surfaced in the state legislature in 2019 with a broad raft of sponsors but hasn't received full approval. "If allowing local governments to bring their assets to bear in addressing the critical infrastructure issue of our time was a no-brainer in December of 2019, it is even more of a no-brainer in December of 2020," said Meyer in the op-ed. "It has simply become unacceptable and unconscionable that a handful of companies stand in the way of allowing this to happen."

NC First Commission Releases Ideas for Future Transportation Financing

In late-breaking news for the Bulletin, the NC First Commission, a state body evaluating the state's transportation investment needs, issued its final report of ideas during a virtual meeting today (Friday). The extensive report, prompted by inadequacies and in some cases obsolescence in the state's revenue sources for transportation projects in this fast-growing state, reflects two years of work from the commission, which includes local

fuel

government officials and has had former Raleigh mayor Nancy McFarlane as its chair, with Banner Elk Mayor Brenda Smith Lyerly and Charlotte Mayor Pro Tem Julie Eiselt on board as well. Their report represents the culmination of more than a year of in-depth analysis and recommends consideration of a laundry list of possible revenue and financing options to address a projected $20 billion shortfall of funds needed over the next 10 years to meet state transportation needs. Read the 173-page document in full online.

NCLM Legal Team's Schwitzgebel Receives Highest Honor

gregg

Gregg Schwitzgebel, associate general counsel and longtime member of the League's legal department, has been presented the North Carolina Judicial Branch's highest award, Friend of the Court. As explained in a press release from the Administrative Office of the Courts, the honor recognizes Schwitzgebel's "instrumental role in coordinating events commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Court of Appeals in 2017, as well as his years of service as a trustee and officer for the North Carolina Supreme Court Historical Society and his role as vice chair of the Bicentennial celebration of the Supreme Court of North Carolina in 2019." The courts system also pointed out his "extraordinary dedication" as an advocate for elected and administrative officials of cities and towns across the state and to North Carolinians for post-judicial clerkship."

Schwitzgebel has built his career on this kind of service and has championed the League's Judicial Advocacy & Amicus Program, in which League attorneys write "friend of the court" briefs in appellate cases that have statewide implications for local governments.

"This truly is a huge, huge honor for Gregg," League Executive Director Paul Meyer said.

In mid-2020, we reported that Schwitzgebel had been elected N.C. Bar Association vice-chair for the 2020-21 Bar Year, coinciding with his 30th year serving governments in North Carolina.

The new award itself reads in part, "In recognition of his extraordinary contribution to the administration of justice as Associate General Counsel at NCLM."

‘Very Dangerous Position;’ COVID Stay-Home Order Extended

state covid

Almost all of North Carolina is now code red on COVID-19 spread, according to state figures published on the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services’ (DHHS) County Alert System. The alert system labels counties either yellow, orange or red -- red the most severe -- and at this point only four counties remain in the yellow. “North Carolina is experiencing record high numbers of COVID-19 cases reported each day, of people being hospitalized with COVID-19 and people in the intensive care unit as well as the percent of tests that are positive, indicating very high levels of viral spread across the state,” says the latest alert report.

Gov. Roy Cooper on Wednesday announced an extension to the current stay-at-home order that requires people to be in their homes between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. That’s set to last through at least Jan. 29, the governor’s team said in a press release. Further, DHHS Secretary Mandy Cohen put out a “secretarial directive” with “stark warnings for North Carolinians to avoid indoor spaces without masks and gatherings between households,” the release added.

“We are in a very dangerous position,” Cohen said. “North Carolinians need to take immediate actions to save lives, slow the spread of the virus, and protect hospital capacity so that medical care is available to anyone who may need it, whether for COVID-19 or for any other reason.”

In related news, previously, on Dec. 30, the governor signed an executive order extending the state’s moratorium on evictions for nonpayment of rent.

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