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

Jan. 15, 2021 | NCLM.org

The Weekly Recap

WHAT HAPPENED: The General Assembly kicked off its 2021 session, with a new class of legislators including yet another new member with municipal experience in former Knightdale mayor James Roberson, just appointed to the House. While the first day of the legislative long session typically comes with ceremonial goings-on – swearings-in attended by lawmakers' families, photos on the House and Senate floors, and so on – the circumstances of the day made for a colder intro.

WHAT IT MEANS: Pandemic-related regulations were in effect, and there was a heavy security presence around the Legislative Building's perimeter in response to the culminated emotions about the presidential transition. No bills were filed, and the chambers are now on a two-week break. When they return, it's likely to be a slow ramp-up, and most legislative attention will be on the pandemic. The League as always will follow the action closely and report on the movement of matters pertinent to cities and towns.

ON TAP: Speaking of, **this is the final day for cities and towns to vote** on the League's advocacy-goals-setting process for the new biennium. See the piece that follows in this Bulletin for information. In the end, the League will have 10 official advocacy goals, as selected by North Carolina cities and towns, to work toward as the 2021-22 session unfolds.

THE SKINNY: A lot's happening and, as you'll see, this Weekly Recap barely scratched the surface. Read on for important updates about broadband, the performance of the state pension plan, the next federal stimulus proposal (with money for state and local government), and deadlines for filing bills at the General Assembly.

DEADLINE IS NOW to Vote on Advocacy Goals

Tagline

Don't wait – if your municipality hasn't yet voted on the slate of proposed advocacy goals for the new legislative biennium, now's the time. Since before the holidays, we've mailed out links and details about the goals-setting process and subsequently received more than 450 ideas from cities and towns across the state. The League's dedicated Legislative Policy Committee reviewed each one of them, and the League Board of Directors set a slate of 17 final candidate goals for consideration. With great participation to date, member cities and towns have reviewed these proposed goals and voted on the ones they want for a final list of 10 goals that will be our focus for the 2021-22 legislative biennium. If your city or town hasn't made its selections online, today (Jan. 15) is the deadline. Thank you for your continued participation in this important process. If you have questions, please direct them to kwaddell@nclm.org**.**

Bill Filing Deadlines Set as NCGA Gavels In

bills

The N.C. General Assembly marked its ceremonial start to the 2021 legislative long session this week, with swearings-in and other introductory happenings (abridged by the pandemic). Legislators weren't at the point yet of filing bills, but the deadlines for doing so should be noted for your planning. Different deadlines apply to different kinds of bills; for instance, local bills have different deadlines than more general spending bills.

Local bills in the House are due to the bill drafting office by March 3 and must be introduced by March 25.

Local bills in the Senate are due to bill drafting by Feb. 25 and must be introduced by March 11.

Local bills are filed by a legislator representing the affected area.

Other deadlines:

HOUSE

-Commission/interim committee recommended bills: Feb. 3 (bill drafting); March 25 (introduction)

-Agency Bills: Feb. 10; Feb. 25

-Non-appropriations/non-finance public bills: March 24; April 20

-Appropriations: March 31; April 27

SENATE

All public bills: March 11; April 26.

The League will track and report on legislation of importance to cities and towns as the session unfolds. You can also follow along at https://www.ncleg.gov/.

Congratulations to New Legislative Committee Leaders

City officials, please take a moment this weekend to offer your congratulations to our state legislature's newly appointed committee leaders. Both Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger (left) and House Speaker Tim Moore (below) announced their fresh leadership teams in the lead-up to this week's swearing-in ceremonies. Legislators appointed to these positions assume additional duties and commitments, and they lead all initial discussions of proposed legislation.

Committees in each chamber target both revenue-raising (Finance) and spending (Appropriations) as well as numerous subject-matter committees, such as Local Government, Commerce, and Transportation. Check the list of House committee leaders and the Senate committee webpages to see if your local legislator will serve in one of these roles this session.

Transportation Funding Suggestions Land at Legislature

Over a dozen suggestions for funding transportation needs over the long-term landed at the legislature this week. These ideas, proposed by a panel of industry leaders (including local governments), were shared at a Monday meeting of House members on an interim legislative committee dedicated to examining long-term options for funding the state's

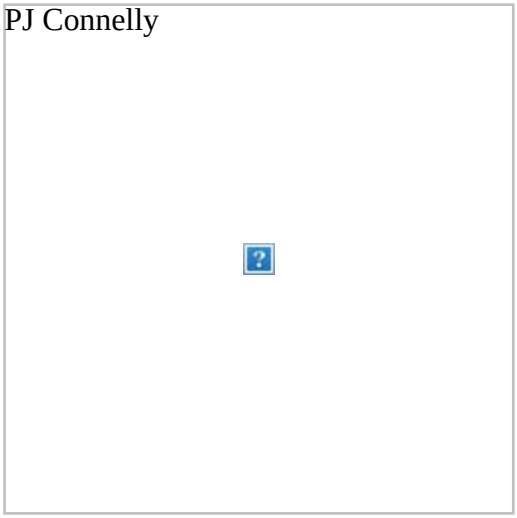
transportation needs. Chief among the ideas recommended by the NC FIRST Commission was a switch from taxing gasoline to instead charging a mileage-based user fee, in which drivers paid based on the miles they drove. While a small-scale pilot program testing out this concept is already underway in the state, the commission also recommended that the legislature enact a more comprehensive pilot program to work out details, with a goal of full implementation by 2030. The Commission developed its numerous funding recommendations over the past 18 months and issued a final report last week. The League thanks all the local leaders who served on the commission, including co-chair and former Raleigh Mayor Nancy McFarlane, Charlotte Mayor Pro Tem Julie Eiselt, and Banner Elk Mayor Brenda Lyerly.

Broadband News: AG Alerted to Reportedly Unreliable Service; New, Fast Options Announced in Greenville, Fayetteville

computer

Internet problems can hamstring community commerce, education and health.

The internet service provider for communities including New Bern, Ayden, Kinston, Washington and Tarboro is the subject of complaints to the attorney general's office as reportedly inadequate service frustrates residents, businesses and public agencies – particularly during the pandemic. Complaints of poor service by these communities regarding provider Suddenlink further highlight the need for better internet solutions statewide, with so much riding on reliable connections. "I will tell you since I've been mayor, the number one complaint I have, the number one complaint is the present provider," news channel WNCT quoted of New Bern Mayor Dana Outlaw in a story this week. "In these COVID times, they need communication. They need the ability to connect with healthcare and other things." New Bern and other communities in the same predicament are alerting the state attorney general's office with hope of some kind of remedy. The Standard newspaper of Snow Hill reported this week on Ayden's interest in the situation. "A solution is critical since many students and businesses rely on internet services," the newspaper reported, adding the problem is not new. "You can be right in the middle of a major assignment or something you're doing and the internet goes off," Mayor Outlaw said in the WNCT report. It added that New Bern has tried to solve the problem with the provider for years, but has "gotten nowhere." Other towns in the area have discussed the problem collectively. The League has urged the General Assembly to pass legislation that would offer up flexibility for cities and towns to partner with service providers to extend and improve internet service for underserved areas.



In other news, some North Carolina communities are seeing a big boost in service, thanks to investment partnerships involving local government. On Thursday, news station WITN reported that MetroNet and the City of Greenville have a new agreement that's set to bring superfast internet, TV and phone services to the area. "This announcement is a game-changer for the City of Greenville," WITN quotes of Mayor P.J. Connelly (pictured at left). "As our city continues to grow, it is vital that we are able to provide fast, reliable, and affordable fiber optic options. At no time has that been more apparent than during the COVID-19 pandemic as virtual learning and remote work made the need for increased broadband access even more apparent. MetroNet's high-speed fiber internet will increase technological capabilities for residents and businesses throughout the city and help Greenville thrive for years to come." A similar announcement aired just prior in Fayetteville. MetroNet, based in Indiana, revealed it would spend more than $70 million to expand into the Fayetteville area. The Fayetteville Observer newspaper said MetroNet is known for "its reliable, high-speed internet-friendly service…." "This tremendous investment brings unprecedented capabilities to existing businesses and gives Fayetteville the infrastructure and competitive edge needed to attract new … business and grow jobs," Fayetteville Mayor Mitch Colvin said. The same newspaper recently published an op-ed by League Executive Director Paul Meyer on the importance of legislative action to extend better broadband opportunities.

‘American Rescue Plan’ Includes State, Local Funding

the white house

President-elect Joe Biden’s $1.9 trillion stimulus proposal would provide state and local governments $350 billion. A lengthy press release about the contents of the “American Rescue Plan,” a feature of which is $1,400 one-off payments to income-qualifying Americans, described the state and local inclusion as “emergency funding for state, local, and territorial governments to ensure that they are in a position to keep front line public workers on the job and paid, while also effectively distributing the vaccine, scaling testing, reopening schools, and maintaining other vital services.”

The Biden team is also calling for $3 billion for the Economic Development Administration for grants the agency would provide directly to state and local governments and other potential recipients to fund “bottom’s up economic development and enable good paying jobs.” They note it’s double the amount of such funding the CARES Act provided.

The plan additionally marks $20 billion “for the hardest hit public transit agencies. This relief will keep agencies from laying off transit workers and cutting the routes that essential

workers rely on every day while making these transit systems more resilient and ensuring that communities of color maintain the access to opportunity that public transportation provides," the press release says.

The plan, which the Biden teamed called "ambitious, but achievable," received praise from the National League of Cities. "Delivering direct, flexible aid to local governments across the country is an essential step to fueling our nation's economic recovery and will offer local officials and their communities the resources they need as they manage mounting costs and increasing demands on local government resources to protect their residents," the organization's CEO, Clarence E. Anthony, said. The U.S. Conference of Mayors also welcomed the news. "Cities of all sizes must have direct, flexible assistance so that they can be a driver rather than a drag on America's recovery," Louisville, Kentucky Mayor Greg Fischer, the group's president, said in a statement.

The package is a pre-administration proposal that would have to go through the usual congressional approvals. Route Fifty has more details about the proposal with reactions from political officials.

State Pension Plan Charts 11% Return Rate

dale folwell

State Treasurer Dale Folwell at a 2018 League event.

North Carolina Retirement Systems hit a record $114.9 billion valuation crossing into 2021 and logged an 11 percent rate of return for the 2020 calendar year, beating the 7 percent actuarial target. That's according to an update from the office of the state treasurer, Dale Folwell, this week. The state pension plan earned an estimated 11.6 percent return rate for the first six months of the current fiscal year, the report added. The plan "has now exceeded the actuarial rate of return three of the past four years while maintaining a conservative risk profile. Return numbers were 13.53% in 2017, and 14.88% in 2019. Returns showed a –1.47% return in 2018 due to major stock market indexes posting their worst annual performances in a decade," the office explained, adding the state's "coveted" Triple-A bond rating is subsequently under no threat with this performance. Folwell's report said the good bond rating, from all-three national rating agencies, "enables the state and local governments to obtain low interest rates when taking on debt to fund capital projects, thus saving taxpayers' money."

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