

# THE COLUMN

News from  
the Virginia Institute  
of Government

Spring/Summer 2000

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## Commission on the Condition and Future of Virginia's Cities

*Several proposals become legislation.*

ANTON (TONY) GARDNER

The Institute and the Cooper Center for Public Service have been providing staff support for the Commission on the Condition and Future of Virginia's Cities (Cities Commission). Over the past two years, the Commission has tapped the expertise of hundreds of state and local government officials, academics, and private citizens in an effort to identify the most crucial issues facing Virginia's cities. Through structured forums, public hearings and its own deliberations, the Commission prepared a number of legislative and budgetary proposals to address many of these challenges.

Several Commission proposals were adopted by the 2000 General Assembly, including bills that create Housing Revitalization Zones and an Urban Public-Private Redevelopment Fund. A third bill directs state agencies to examine the feasibility of locating new facilities in urban areas. In the budget, funding was increased for both the Derelict Structures fund and the Regional Competitiveness Act incentive fund.

A proposal for JLARC to study the Standards of Quality (SOQ) for public education was adopted by the General Assembly but vetoed by the Governor. However, based on public interest, JLARC has decided to undertake the study. Another proposal vetoed by the Governor would have permitted localities to create Regional Economic Development Authorities.

The General Assembly carried over to its next session Commission proposals to increase funding for public transit services,

provide VDOT maintenance funding for urban roads, and create "shared cities." Also, during its next session, the General Assembly will receive recommendations from the Commission on Virginia's State and Local Tax Structure for the 21st Century. The tax study is another result of the Cities Commission.

It is also relevant to note that the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), as directed by SJ218, will conduct a two-year study and develop recommendations based on the work of the Cities Commission.

★ ★ ★

*The writer, the Institute's urban issues coordinator, worked for Arlington County for 26 years, over 10 (1987-1998) as county manager.*

*More information on the Commission's recommendations can be found at [www2.institute.virginia.edu/communique](http://www2.institute.virginia.edu/communique). Or contact Tony Gardner at 804/245-9255. ▼*

## Commission on Virginia's State and Local Tax Structure for the 21st Century

M. H. WILKINSON, Ph.D.

In response to a recommendation of the Commission on the Condition and Future of Virginia's Cities, the 1999 Virginia General Assembly established the Commission on Virginia's State and Local Tax Structure for the 21st Century. The Commission's directive is to examine "all aspects of the state and local tax structure" as well as "the proper division of revenues

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## Tax Structure

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and responsibilities for services" between the two levels of government in the Commonwealth. Chairing the 15-member Commission is Dr. Thomas R. Morris, president of Emory & Henry College. The resolution establishing the Commission (HJR 578) directs the Weldon Cooper Center to provide the principal staff support for the study.

Indicative of the complexity of the Commission's work is the fact that the study resolution lists 19 economic trends and conditions that prompted the inquiry. All these trends and conditions will require consideration during the course of the Commission's deliberations.

In addition to the general charge set forth in the study resolution, the Commission has been asked to consider 11 proposals previously developed by the Commission on the Condition and Future of Virginia's Cities. Further, the 2000 General Assembly session generated additional issues for the Commission's consideration. The latter issues consist of proposals to:

- 1) *eliminate merchants' capital tax and business, professional, and occupational license taxes;*
- 2) *grant fiscal autonomy to elected school boards;*
- 3) *change method by which merchants remit their state and local sales tax collections;*
- 4) *examine equity of the sales and use tax in the current commercial environment; and*
- 5) *consider changes in the application of the sales and use tax to certain purchases by federal contractors.*

An important resource for the Commission is the series of public hearings being held around the state. These sessions allow the Commission to receive testimony from a variety of sources, including: participants in similar tax studies in other states; officials from Virginia's executive and legislative agencies; representatives of the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, and other local governmental associations in the Commonwealth; representatives of individual localities; and members of the public. The Commission antici-

pates holding regularly scheduled sessions until the conclusion of its deliberations at the end of the calendar year.

While the materials and testimony presented to the Commission have addressed both state and local fiscal issues, local governmental concerns have been its principal focus. It appears that the preeminent concern of local governments is that their revenue lacks the elasticity necessary to meet their service responsibilities. Local officials have expressed concern with their inordinate reliance on the real property tax base and with the languishing nature of their real property assessments. In terms of service responsibility, they contend that the state is not bearing an appropriate share of the operational cost of the public schools, nor of the cost of school construction.

The task before the Commission is one of considerable substance and importance. We encourage your participation and will continue to keep you apprised of our activities.

★★★

*The writer is staff director of the Commission on Virginia's State and Local Tax Structure for the 21st Century. He served as executive director of the Commission on Local Government for 20 years.*

*Visit the tax study Web site at [www2.institute.virginia.edu/taxstudy/](http://www2.institute.virginia.edu/taxstudy/). For more information, contact Leisa Steele, executive assistant to the Tax Study Commission at 804/786-4273 or [leisasteele@erols.com](mailto:leisasteele@erols.com).* ▼

## Lynchburg Welfare Reform Research Project

*Study yields unexpected answers.*

DR. THOMAS SEAMAN

Compared to the rest of the state, the City of Lynchburg got a head start on welfare reform when it was selected, along with Culpeper County, as a test locality for reform. In Lynchburg reform began in October 1995.

As plans were made and implementation began, city administrators tried to anticipate the impact that reform would have on the public and private services used by

**The prevailing suspicion was that welfare families were not only major consumers of welfare services but also major and primary users of all services available to the poor.**

★

**The study yielded striking results that were quite contrary to the original assumption.**

★

**A dramatic byproduct of the study's first phase was the increased collaboration among the city's service providers in the design and delivery of services.**

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welfare families. It soon became apparent that very little was known either locally or nationally about the service utilization patterns of welfare families.

The prevailing suspicion was that welfare families were not only major consumers of welfare services but also major and primary users of all services available to the poor. If this assumption were valid, what would be the impact of welfare reform? Would the demands for services increase or decrease? Would some services become obsolete? Would new services be needed? And equally important, what if the assumption were not valid?

As the questions increased, a dialogue developed among interested parties prompting the formation of an alliance. Its goal — to examine the use of community resources and services by Lynchburg's welfare recipients and determine if services to this population could be improved. The partners in the study included: the City of Lynchburg and its Department of Human Services, Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Institute of Government and Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, and Center for Community Development at Lynchburg College. Research began in February of 1998 and was completed in March 2000. Project director was Dr. Gail Funke, a social scientist and expert in policy research.

At the study's core was a statistical analysis of the types and frequency of public and private services used between 1993 and 1998 by all individuals receiving welfare benefits in Lynchburg as of October 1995. The target population comprised 2,902 individuals. The statistical analysis was supplemented by case histories of 50 randomly selected families in the study population.

The study yielded striking results that were quite contrary to the original assumption. Members of welfare families were not the primary users of services available outside of the Department of Social Services. Welfare families were heavy users of emergency room and Health Department medical services and moderate users of assisted housing services. However, they were light to nonusers of other services, such as those offering emergency cash, mental health assistance, school behavior guidance, and services of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court.

Case histories revealed that the vast majority of welfare families viewed welfare

assistance as a resource to be used as briefly as possible and only as a last resort. Most wanted to avoid the stigma that accompanies receiving and using services available to the poor.

A dramatic byproduct of the study's first phase was the increased collaboration among the city's service providers in the design and delivery of services.

The project's leadership team plans to seek support to continue the project. The next phase — the Community Phase — will follow the same population through two additional years of service use. More importantly, the goal of the Community Phase is to develop a plan for and begin to implement the redesign of services and service delivery systems based on the research findings.

★★★

*The writer, research director of the Lynchburg Welfare Reform Project, is professor of sociology at Lynchburg College and director of the College's Center for Community Development and Social Justice.*

*For more information on the project, contact Tom Seaman at 804/544-8327 or [Seaman\\_T@mail.lyncburg.edu](mailto:Seaman_T@mail.lyncburg.edu).* ▼

## **EBIS**

*Use of information resource climbs.*

**P**erhaps the best way to measure the success of the Institute's Email-Broadcast Information Service (EBIS) is with the numbers. During 1997, the year of its inception, the service received 42 inquiries. In its second year, 86 inquiries came in. In the last 12 months, over 180 have been received. The database now contains the names of over 1,000 local government professionals who have responded to inquiries. This database is becoming an encyclopedic reference on almost every day-to-day topic of importance to Virginia local governments.

Responding to inquiries has evolved into a daily routine for many of the state's localities. Without the excellent response rate, EBIS would fail, for the service is only as useful as the information it receives and the speed in which it transmits this information. The questions asked usually

*continued on page 4*

## What is EBIS?

EBIS stands for the Institute's Email-Broadcast Information Service.

### How does it work?

Let's say you need a job description for a new position. You or your staff can spend hours on the phone calling or emailing colleagues for their descriptions. Or you can submit one inquiry to EBIS.

If you use EBIS, your question will reach over 200 local government professionals in Virginia, and you will begin receiving information that same day via email.

### Who may use EBIS?

Institute member localities

## EBIS

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need immediate, accurate responses.

Recent "hot topics" on EBIS have dealt with cell tower siting fees, fund balance policies, pay-for-performance programs, financial software packages for small jurisdictions, and transitioning from volunteer to paid rescue squads.

Success is usually accompanied by new challenges. For EBIS these include managing the volume of hard copy items submitted by localities in response to questions and providing adequate staff assistance to keep up with the increasing number of inquiries and responses. (Each inquiry generates an average of 15 responses, which means that Institute staff handled approximately 2700 EBIS transactions in the past 12 months.)

Each year, at VLGMA's winter conference, the Institute awards plaques to those localities that contributed the most responses to EBIS. This year 66 localities received recognition.

The Institute wishes to thank everyone — those who ask the questions and those who provide the answers — who uses EBIS.

★★★

*For more information on EBIS, contact Tedd Povar at [tep3e@virginia.edu](mailto:tep3e@virginia.edu) or 804/371-0202. ▼*

## Money Back Guarantee on Internships

*Leadership 2020 begins receiving requests from local governments.*

To date, 12 Virginia local governments have posted summer job openings to Leadership 2020, the Institute's internship program. These listings are a response to the Institute's offer of a money back guarantee on summer interns.

Primarily a summer program, Leadership 2020 (L2020) internships are unusual because the interns earn stipends and credit. Each intern will work between 20 and 35 hours per week for a 10- to 12-week period between May and August for a monthly stipend of \$1,000.

Through L2020, students will gain exposure to the importance and value of the work of local government as well as its

potential rewards. The stipend and credit should send the message that their talents are valued in the field of public service.

Research indicates that there are large numbers of students in all fields of study interested in government and public service. However, they don't know that career opportunities exist in local government. As a result, they choose careers in the private sector, not only for higher pay, but because corporations are more effective in recruiting and hiring recent graduates. L2020 was developed to level the recruiting playing field and give local government a shot at hiring some of the best and brightest.

Where will the interns come from? So far L2020 has received student applications from the College of William & Mary, Hampden-Sydney College, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Regent University, University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Military Institute, and Virginia State University.

The money back guarantee is offered only to the first 12 localities to submit placement descriptions to Leadership 2020. However, all localities are encouraged to list their openings. Considering the caliber of its student applicants, the Institute considers its claim risk to be extremely low.

★★★

*Visit the Leadership 2020 Web site at [www.L2020.institute.virginia.edu](http://www.L2020.institute.virginia.edu). For more information, contact Nancy Gansneder at 804/982-4770 or email [intern-L2020@virginia.edu](mailto:intern-L2020@virginia.edu). ▼*

## Institute Increases Focus on Urban Issues

*Former Arlington County manager to concentrate on refining Institute role as an urban resource.*

The Institute recently welcomed Anton (Tony) Gardner as its urban issues coordinator, a new position for the Institute. After 26 years in Arlington County (he was manager from 1987-1998), Gardner is quite familiar with the complex challenges facing Virginia's urban area.

Building on recent Institute efforts, Gardner will concentrate on the concerns and professional development needs of the

## Acronym Index

Below is a list of acronyms used in this issue of **THE COLUMN**.

**ICMA**

International City/County Management Association

**IPMA**

International Personnel Management Association

**JLARC**

Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission

**LGA**

Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc.

**L2020**

Leadership 2020 Internship Program

**NACo**

National Association of Counties

**VACo**

Virginia Association of Counties

**VDOT**

Virginia Department of Transportation

**VLGMA**

Virginia Local Government Management Association

**VML**

Virginia Municipal League

state's local urban managers. In order to achieve this, Gardner will:

- serve as Institute liaison with local urban officials, particularly urban government chief executives;
- provide assistance and guidance to the state's executive and legislative branches as they begin developing an urban policy for Virginia;
- identify those crucial local issues requiring applied research, e.g., urban sprawl, mass transit, education; broker research with the state's institutions of higher education;
- structure a professional development curriculum for Virginia urban managers based on required competencies of the ICMA University; and

- develop and coordinate a system to foster regular issues-based dialogue among urban managers.

How does Gardner feel about his new role? "I am delighted to be working with Virginia's urban leaders," he replies. "They are in the national forefront for their innovations in community leadership and urban management. As their efforts continue in the face of today's complex social and economic challenges, I anticipate assisting by providing forums for shared dialogue and facilitating their access to the considerable applied research capabilities of the state's colleges and universities."

★★★

*You can reach Tony Gardner at 804/245-9255. ▼*

## UPCOMING

### Public Policy Institute Teaches Art of Public Deliberation and Civic Engagement

*Institute to take place "on the lawn" at UVa, June 8-10*

The Public Policy Institutes promote experiential learning — "learning by doing." What exactly does this mean?

Based on the National Issues Forums civic network, the Institute revives the idea of the town meeting in which citizens take responsibility for their choices and actions. Institute participants choose between two tracks — education or governance — as the framework to consider a broad range of choices, weigh the pros and cons, and meet with each other in a deliberative dialogue to identify shared concerns.

Those who attend will:

- learn the difference between deliberation and debate;
- participate in two or more forums;
- practice moderating a deliberative, civil discourse among people with diverse views; and

- take home methods and materials to conduct forums in the community, classroom, or kitchen table.

Hosts of the June Institute at UVa are the National Society for Experiential Education, National Issues Forum Institute, Cooper Center for Public Service, and the Virginia Institute of Government.

★★★

*Summaries of the issues can be found on the conference Web site at [www.institute.virginia.edu/ppi](http://www.institute.virginia.edu/ppi).*

*For information on the June program content, contact Nancy Gansneder at 804/982-4770 or [nancyg@virginia.edu](mailto:nancyg@virginia.edu). For registration, contact Jennifer Riley at 804/982-5754 or [jr5t@virginia.edu](mailto:jr5t@virginia.edu). ▼*

### Forum Series on E-Commerce and Economic Development

*First Forum to be held on June 9th in Richmond.*

How can you ensure your community's survival and prosperity in this age of explosive innovation in telecommunications and information technologies? Part of the answer is knowing how to support e-commerce business development.

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## UPCOMING

**E-Commerce***continued from page 5*

To help you explore this complex issue, the Institute is collaborating on a series of forums to take place over the next several months.

The first forum, scheduled for June 9 in Richmond, has been titled, *The Last Mile to Virtual Communities*. It will focus on providing affordable access to high bandwidth communications in homes, businesses, and local and state agencies. It is being planned and coordinated by Virginia Tech in cooperation with the Greater Richmond Technology Council and the Institute.

Future forums (locations and dates to be announced) will focus on possible answers to other key questions, such as:

- How can you assess your community's current resources and future needs to compete in the new economy?

- How do you market your locality to the new economy businesses?
- How do you adjust your workforce in this changing economy?

In addition to the Institute, the planning team includes Virginia Tech Office of Information Technology Initiatives, Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Greater Richmond Technology Council, and Virginia Innovation Group.

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*For information on the June 9th program content, please contact Cindy Woods at 540/231-4227 or cwoods@vt.edu. For registration information, call 540/231-5182 or visit [www.conted.vt.edu/ssl/mile-reg.htm](http://www.conted.vt.edu/ssl/mile-reg.htm).*

*For more information on the forum series, contact Tedd Povar at 804/371-0202 or tep3e@virginia.edu. ▼*

**INSTITUTE UPDATE****Electronic Information Services**

Over the past months, the Institute electronic communications staff has:

- continued to provide assistance in Web-site development to Virginia localities, most recently to Greensville and Sussex Counties;
- participated in a panel discussion, *County Websites — Necessity or Luxury?*, at NACo conference in March;
- begun hosting bi-monthly meetings of the Virginia Local Government Web Alliance, a new organization created to provide an infrastructure and resources for local government Web development and management. The group comprises approximately 40 representatives from Virginia local governments, VACo, VML, NACo, and Anderson and Associates; and
- developed and made enhancements to several Web sites of interest to local governments, including sites for Leadership 2020 (new graphics), IPMA (membership directory search engine), VML (search index), and LGA (new graphics).

*For more information on electronic communication services, contact Mary Beth Hewa at 804/982-5707 or meh4q@virginia.edu*

**Web addresses for sites referenced above:**

www.naco.org  
 www.VACO.ORG  
 www.vml.org  
 www.vlgwa.org (pending)  
 www.L2020.institute.virginia.edu  
 www.ipma.org  
 www2.institute.virginia.edu/LGA

## ***Leadership Development Services and Training***

A number of localities have used the Institute as a resource in a variety of forums. During the past several months, the Institute been asked to:

- participate with VLGMA and Virginia Department of Emergency Services to formulate plan for collaboration and assistance among localities during disasters — planning meeting;
- discuss with VLGMA and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police collaboration between the two organizations — planning meeting;
- present keynote address to Chesterfield County — management team meeting;
- conduct two professional development sessions for human resource managers of 15 participating localities — High Performance Government Forum;
- design and conduct team-building program for Fluvanna County — leadership team retreat;
- provide team assessments and training for Fluvanna County Department of Parks and Recreation — senior staff development seminars;
- participate with City of Manassas Park — community planning session;
- present keynote for Hampton Roads — Civic Leadership Institute;
- cosponsor with Virginia Innovation Group — *A Key to High Performance Governments: Councils and Boards that Lead* — attended by teams from the cities of Danville, Lynchburg, and Roanoke and the counties of Chesterfield and Fauquier — retreat; and
- facilitate for City of Colonial Heights — manager, council, department heads retreat.

*For more information on leadership development services and training, contact Billie Easton at 804/371-0202 or [column@virginia.edu](mailto:column@virginia.edu).*

## ***Programs***

Major programs in which the Institute has been involved within the last 12 months:

**Preserving Community Character.** Conference sponsored by the Virginia Innovation Group with the support of the Institute, Virginia Association of Counties, and Virginia Municipal League. February 9 in Richmond.

**Public Service in the New Century.** Forum sponsored by the Institute and hosted by the Department of Public Administration at Virginia State University. December 10, 1999, in Petersburg.

**Creating the Future: How Smart Government Works '99.** Conference cosponsored by the Virginia Innovation Group and Loudoun County in partnership with the Institute and Virginia Local Government Management Association. September 9-10, 1999, in Leesburg.

**The Diversity Initiative: Implementing a Culture Change Process in State and Local Government.** Seminar cosponsored with the Center for Public Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University. June 9, 1999, and February 24 in Richmond. 60 attending.

**Localities Helping Localities into the Year 2000.** Regional forums sponsored by the Institute in cooperation with the Century Date Change Initiative Office, Virginia Association of Counties, and Virginia Municipal League. April 15, 1999, in Richmond; April 22 in Winchester; May 6 in Blacksburg.

*For more information on programs, contact Billie Easton at 804/371-0202 or [column@virginia.edu](mailto:column@virginia.edu)*



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**UPCOMING**



**FORUM**

**The Last Mile to Virtual Communities**

*Providing affordable access to high bandwidth communications  
in homes, businesses, and local and state agencies*

JUNE 9 — RICHMOND



**PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE**

**The Art of Public Deliberation and Civic Engagement**

*Teaching civil discourse among people with diverse views*

JUNE 8-10 — UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

*See page 5 for details*