

# Minnesota Counties



A quarterly publication of the Association of Minnesota Counties.

## Minnesota Counties Represented on National Broadband Task Force



Rich Sve



Tarryl Clark



Mike Slavik



Terry Ocaña

The National Association of Counties (NACo) formed a broadband task force last fall, under the leadership of NACo President Gary Moore. Comprised of nearly three dozen county government officials from across America, the task force is studying the lack of reliable broadband with a particular focus on the challenges facing underserved communities.

The four Minnesotans included on the task force are AMC President and Lake County Commissioner Rich Sve, Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik, Stearns County Commissioner Tarryl Clark, and Chippewa County Information Technology Director Terry Ocaña.

“Broadband expansion has been a top policy issue for as long as I have been a commissioner,” said AMC President and Lake County Commissioner Rich Sve. “This NACo task force is taking those policy discussions to the next level, developing concrete steps for federal policy action, which will translate to applicable resources for counties.”

The task force will examine the intersection of public and private sector efforts to deploy broadband networks with the aim of creating a blueprint for governments working to bridge the digital divide. Not only will this work help shape NACo’s broadband federal policy priorities, but also showcase best practices and innovative solutions to expanding broadband in underserved counties nationwide.

“Reliable high-speed internet is critical for rural economies, and we have learned through the COVID-19 pandemic that access to broadband is an issue in urban and suburban counties, too,” said Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik. “This is a statewide and nationwide priority.”

Lack of reliable broadband is a major barrier to socioeconomic opportunity, education, health and overall quality of life. Without access to high-speed internet, many rural communities – and

even pockets in urban areas – are isolated and left behind. A 2018 study conducted by Microsoft concluded that 19 million rural Americans do not use broadband, largely due to a lack of access. For these small communities, broadband can serve as a lifeline, connecting students to online degrees and connecting sick patients to medical consultation that is locally unavailable.

High-speed internet is also consistently identified as a top challenge facing small businesses in rural America and stifles entrepreneurship by limiting the ability of individuals to take on independent work. In this economy, broadband is critical to building resilient and future ready communities.

“In addition to the traditional geographic disparities, we are also examining the racial and ethnic disparities in access to broadband,” said Stearns County Commissioner Tarryl Clark. “The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that access to high speed internet is critical for all Americans.”

The task force has met twice with a plan for more meetings in 2021. Ultimately, the Task Force will overall report as well as other products and resources to assist local governments throughout the various stages of broadband deployment.

“I am hopeful about the blueprint we are developing for counties to help bridge the digital divide,” said Chippewa County Information Technology Director Terry Ocaña. “All counties need resources to tackle broadband development for the sake of their citizens.” ■

To explore all of NACo’s broadband resources, visit [www.naco.org/broadband](http://www.naco.org/broadband).

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## What is your home internet speed?



The Minnesota Rural Broadband Coalition is conducting a statewide crowd-sourced internet speed testing initiative.

The goal of this project is to create an accurate statewide map of where internet service is available and what speeds people are currently receiving.

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# County Leadership is Critical at This Stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner and AMC President

My grandparents always had a small bowl filled with sugar cubes at the kitchen table, they dipped the cubes into their coffee before quickly popping it into their mouths. If the opportunity presented itself, I too would pop one in my mouth (yum). In 1961, I stood looking at the pink sugar cube in my hand, the woman standing in front of me encouraged that I eat it quickly. It surely did not taste like those on grandma's table, but rather was medicinally sweet and somewhat sickening. I would later come to know that is how I received my polio vaccination.

I do not remember receiving my smallpox vaccine, but the faded circular scar on my left arm indicates I did.

The 1961 Vaccination Assistance Act entered a new dimension to school inoculations.

In the summer of '62, I stood in a long line of grade school children filing through the halls of the elementary school to receive my DTP (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis) immunization.

During a school day in '67, we all lined up again, this time to be inoculated for MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) delivered by some space age device called a Jet Injector. And who can forget the terrible TB Tine Test?!

There would be other "booster" shots for any number of things over my school years, but what I remember most was when your friend ran up and slugged you in the injection site (insert expletive here!).

Why this nostalgic stroll down immunization lane? Since the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in Minnesota nearly a year ago, we have taken many unprecedented steps as county leaders and made decisions we never could have imagined. Not unlike the intent of the 1961 Vaccination Assistance Act, these decisions have been guided by concerns for our communities and the health of our residents.

Counties have been on the front lines in managing this current crisis. As community leaders, we have helped find new ways for counties to operate and helped our communities endure the ongoing economic recession. However, some of the most important work still lies ahead. In the coming months, your leadership will be needed more than ever. We now have the chance to steer our communities back on track. Vaccines are available and are the quickest and most efficient way to end the pandemic. If we fail, there are worsening consequences for our families, the reopening of our counties, or reviving our economy.

There are plenty of unknowns ahead. Getting vaccines to all the Minnesotans who need it will be a significant challenge, and the changing federal guidance and inconsistent supply have made that challenge only more difficult.

I would encourage you to keep in mind the following in the coming months:

You are a trusted leader. This rollout is unprecedented. Your steady leadership is as important as ever, perhaps more so. Making sure your communities are engaged in the vaccine rollout is critical.

There is opportunity for success. Success will mean economic recovery, returning to low unemployment numbers, and seeing businesses revitalized. We can all play a part in making sure the vaccine rollout works. This may include advocating for flexible federal and state funding for counties.

Trust your public health staff. Local public health departments around the state must continually confront emerging health threats. Local public health has the foundation to plan, communicate and administer vaccines. Local public health agencies work in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health. Your staff has the pertinent information and can be a resource on vaccine safety, recommendations, and distribution.

You will no doubt continue to field calls from your constituents on COVID-19, which may cover everything from whether the vaccine is safe to where to get inoculated. Share with them that successful rollout of vaccines and Minnesotans' uptake will take time and patience. Know that your statewide organizations are there to support all of us and that the science and data related to vaccine safety indicates the benefits far outweigh the assumed risks.

Whether at a vaccination center, clinic, pharmacy, or public health facility, I will get in the line and as I reminisce on pink sugar cubes, jet injectors, and being slugged in the arm, I will happily accept the vaccination. ■



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# Local Public Health Plays a Key Role in Delivering COVID-19 Vaccines

By Kari Oldfield, Local Public Health Association of Minnesota Director

Local public health is playing a key role in COVID-19 response, including delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine to members of their communities. Local public health has spent years building partnerships, planning and building capacity to enable successful widespread vaccine delivery.

As of late January, there are two COVID-19 vaccines being distributed, one made by Pfizer and the other by Moderna. The vaccines each require two doses delivered either 21 or 28 days apart.

Vaccines are being distributed based on phases established by the federal government and further defined at the state level. With limited doses of vaccine available initially, the state set forth a plan of vaccinating for maximum impact. Vaccination delivery begun with healthcare workers, first responders, community vaccinators, and long-term care facility staff and residents. In late January, those eligible for vaccines was expanded to include those over age 65 or working in E-12 education or childcare.

Local public health agencies across the state are receiving limited doses of COVID-19 vaccine and delivering them directly through vaccine clinics and at places of business within the designated priority groups.

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 will be one of the best ways to protect yourself and everyone around you. Everyone is urged to continue social distancing, wearing masks, washing their hands, avoiding social gatherings, and staying home when sick even if they are vaccinated. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 gets us closer to the end of the pandemic.

Below are stories from two local public health agencies, highlighting their work in vaccine delivery.

## Carver County – Richard Scott, Public Health Director

Carver County employed a multi-prong approach with its limited vaccine supply, leveraging partnerships across the county to ensure all doses are used and first priority groups served.

The most tangible example the county uses is its joint mobile clinic with Ridgeview, a 53-foot semi-trailer converted into a mobile medical clinic with six exam rooms, a lab, conference room and restroom (photos at right). The county used CARES Act funding to purchase the \$500,000 mobile clinic. It operates the mobile clinic jointly with Ridgeview.

Carver County also served EMS personnel and other priority groups via an appointment-only clinic at its Government Center. A main focus beyond vaccine delivery is identifying gaps and assuring skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, and local healthcare providers receive the doses needed. This approach helped Carver County to mobilize partners that can assist with expanded vaccinations moving forward to maintain and increase delivery.

## Waseca County – Sarah Berry, Public Health Director

Waseca County had our third vaccine clinic, and we were able to open the clinic to our friends and partners working and living in group homes. While some of the residents had anxiety about the process, they were able to be vaccinated with the people they live with and those who care for them. We had set aside a waiting area so they could have minimal distraction and could stay with their 'house'. Additionally, many public health staff provide care coordination or are connected in the community to some of the residents, so there was some fun banter and jokes between friends as they waited before and after their shots. One public health social worker charged with our observation area grinned as she told me a gentleman told jokes for 10 minutes straight while waiting after his shot. The process went very smoothly.

While this type of distribution causes stress, we are so pleased to be serving our communities in this way. It is our privilege to follow the carefully formulated priority designations and deliver vaccinations in an equitable manner, especially to those most vulnerable and heavily impacted. Public health's desire is to serve our community in partnership for the health and well-being of all; vaccination in the midst of pandemic is key to that goal. ■



Exterior and interior views of the Carver County mobile clinic, purchased with CARES Act funding, that it operates jointly with Ridgeview.



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## New Format for 2020 MCIT Annual Meeting

With only board members and a few staff in attendance, MCIT Board Chair Felix Schmeising called the 2020 MCIT Annual Membership Meeting to order in the board room of the MCIT building in St. Paul Dec. 11 at 11 a.m. Members attended the meeting from the safety and comfort of their homes and offices this year.

Efforts were made to follow the traditional outline of previous meetings. After approving the agenda, minutes of the 2019 annual meeting and the introduction of board members, Finance Manager Cheri Donovan took the stage to review MCIT's finances.

### Financial Update

Donovan reported that MCIT once again received an unmodified opinion from the independent audit firm of Eide Bailly LLP for the 2019 audit. Highlights from the 2019 financial statement include:

- Member contributions of \$34.6 million represented a minor decrease from 2018, which was influenced largely by the aggregate rate reductions in the workers' compensation division.
- 2019 revenues were \$45.3 million, while expenses for the year totaled \$26 million.
- Net investments yielded \$10 million in income, an increase of more than \$8 million from 2018.
- Claims paid and changes in reserves decreased from \$21 million in 2018 to \$13.9 million in 2019. The decrease was the result of the adjustment required at the conclusion of the actuary's year end analysis.
- Reinsurance premiums paid in the amount of \$4.8 million remained fairly constant compared to \$4.7 million in 2018.
- A dividend of \$10 million was returned to members, which was a decrease from the 2018 dividend of \$11.8 million.
- MCIT ended 2019 with a fund balance of \$85 million.

Donovan also reported on the unaudited finances of MCIT as of Sept. 30, 2020. According to Donovan, expenses and revenues should be at 75 percent of budgeted amounts. She noted that member contributions, paid losses net of recoveries and reinsurance expenses are on target; however, investment income is greater than expected at this point in the year. Administrative and operating expenses are significantly less than expected, which is attributed to the pandemic, specifically less travel for staff and the decisions not to fill new positions as provided in the budget.

### State of MCIT

Following the financial report, Executive Director Robyn Sykes provided an update to the membership on the activities of the past year and shared thoughts and plans for the program in 2021.

Sykes outlined steps taken by MCIT to respond to the pandemic, which included staff working remotely, closing the building to visitors and meetings, and cancelling MCIT staff travel and training. Trainings were eventually retooled to be delivered virtually. New products, including a guide for auto risk management and several resources to establish and sustain a positive safety culture, were premiered to members through virtual meetings.

Even though much of the members' staff worked remotely, the decision was made to introduce the MCIT Workplace Injury Hotline to provide medical advice to employees injured on the job. New marketing materials for the Employee Assistance Program were introduced, including five videos that spotlight key features and frequently asked questions about the program.

Sykes noted that property/casualty aggregate rates continue to trend upward. Although some of the increase is attributed to weather-related claims, the majority of the increase arises from law enforcement and jail operation claims.

Workers' compensation rates declined again due to focused efforts to review and update reserves on aged claims. MCIT continued to monitor post-traumatic stress disorder claims, but COVID-19 claims overshadowed PTSD claims during the year.

According to Sykes, as of the meeting, MCIT had 284 reported positive COVID exposures. Only two employees required hospitalization. MCIT has paid approximately \$90,000 in benefits as of Dec. 11 and expects to pay an



additional \$380,000 for the claims that were being addressed as of that time. She noted that MCIT has seen a significant increase in COVID claims, which mirrors what was happening in the general Minnesota population at the time.

Bright spots in 2020 included the return of a \$10 million dividend to members, the addition of five new members and another first place award from the Minnesota Association of Government Communicators for MCIT's "Essentials of Data Security for Public Entities" guide.

### Looking Ahead to 2021

Sykes noted that 2021 will be a year of adaptation. New products are already being designed. The hope is to deliver them in person later in the year. She noted that the pandemic has helped identify strategies that MCIT will build on. Although MCIT will not rely totally on technology, the pandemic has identified the merits and ability to deliver messages without incurring the cost of travel.

Given the continuing message from reinsurance markets regarding public entity business, a high priority will be researching alternative reinsurance markets for catastrophic property and cyber losses. Sykes cited the decision to join County Reinsurance Limited's liability division in 2021 as an example of MCIT's dedication to exploring options to safeguard the assets of the Trust and its members.

Sykes ended her comments by thanking the board, staff and members for their efforts that continue to contribute to the success of MCIT.

### Board Election Results

Three board members' terms expired at the end of 2020:

- Marcia Ward, Winona County commissioner
- Kirk Peysar, Aitkin County auditor
- Dick Downham, Cass County commissioner

With the annual meeting held in a virtual environment, the election process required voting by mail. Ballots were mailed to voting delegates on Nov. 20 with the deadline for their return no later than 4:30 p.m. Dec. 10.

Before announcing the election results, Yellow Medicine County Commissioner Ron Antony provided a report of the nominating committee that included himself, Jackson County Commissioner Don Wachal and Hubbard County Coordinator Eric Nerness.

Notice of the election was mailed to all eligible individuals (commissioners, auditors and auditor-treasurers) Oct. 9 with a deadline for interested individuals to submit a letter of interest by Nov. 5. All incumbents were seeking re-election.

No letters of interest were received for Seat A held by Ward or Seat B held by Peysar. The situation changed when incumbent board member Downham did not win his local election, thereby making him ineligible to participate on the MCIT Board in 2021. Faced with an open seat, the deadline for submitting a letter of interest for Seat C was extended to Nov. 17.

Eight commissioners expressed interest in the seat. The nominating committee selected Blue Earth County Commissioner Kip Bruender and Roseau County Commissioner Jack Swanson for the ballot after considering factors including political and professional experience, geography, and the composition and expertise of the existing board.

After the ballots were counted, Schmeising announced that Swanson won Seat C and would join returning board members Ward and Peysar on the MCIT Board of Directors.



Marcia Ward



Kirk Peysar



Dick Downham



Jack Swanson

MCIT, continued on page 7.

MCIT, continued from page 6.

### Farewell to Colleagues

Before adjourning the meeting, Schmeising thanked Cass County Commissioner Dick Downham and Polk County Commissioner Don Diedrich for their service on the board. He noted that with their departure, MCIT is losing a great deal of experience, knowledge and humor.



Don Diedrich

Downham had served on the board since 2012, most recently stepping up to perform the duties of secretary-treasurer.

Diedrich chose to retire from public service and did not seek re-election to his county seat in 2020. Since joining MCIT 10 years ago, Diedrich has served on almost every MCIT committee and most recently as vice chair. His departure has created a vacancy on the board. Efforts to fill this seat are underway. County commissioners, auditors and auditor-treasurers are eligible to fill this vacancy and should watch the mail for this formal announcement.

Schmeising closed the meeting by thanking everyone for participating. He added that while phone calls, e-mails, and virtual meetings are helping us navigate business during the pandemic, there is no replacement for the personal time we spend together. He expressed hope that we can meet together in 2021 but emphasized the need to stay safe and healthy. ■

## 2020 MCIT Award Winners

### Excellence in Risk Management Recognized

MCIT Board Chair Felix Schmeising announced the recipients of MCIT's annual awards during the 2020 Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust Annual Membership Meeting held virtually Dec. 11. Preventing and mitigating losses is important to the overall success and stability of MCIT, so every year MCIT recognizes three counties that excel at risk management and loss control.

On behalf of the entire board, Schmeising congratulated the winners on their accomplishments.

Criteria used to identify recipients include performance in risk management and loss control efforts, responsiveness to program initiatives, and property/casualty claims and workers' compensation claims administration.

### County of the Year: Lake County

MCIT honors the county that has set the standard of excellence in risk management and loss control. For 2020, Lake County earned this distinction. Its leaders proved to be aggressive in their efforts to educate and inform staff on techniques to mitigate exposures and provided superior assistance when claims arose.

### Outstanding Performance in Property and Casualty Division: Meeker County

Meeker County consistently improved its loss ratio through its commitment to implementing better loss control and risk management methods and its dedication to protecting county property and citizens.

### Outstanding Performance in the Workers' Compensation Division: Clearwater County

Clearwater County continually improved its experience modification factor and reduced its claims in the areas of workplace injury and illnesses, was committed to reducing employee injuries and had an overall focus on loss control and risk management. ■

## Save These Dates For Events in 2021!

**NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**  
January 20 -21, February 17, March 17, 2021 | Online

**AMC LEGISLATIVE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**  
February 18, 2021 | Online

**NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE**  
February 20 - 24, 2021 | Online

**AMC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT**  
March 31 - April 2, 2021 | Online

**NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE**  
July 16 - 19, 2021 | Travis County, Texas

**NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS WORKSHOP**  
July 2021 | InterContinental Hotel, St. Paul

**AMC FALL POLICY CONFERENCE**  
September 16 - 17, 2021 | Arrowwood, Alexandria

**AMC ANNUAL CONFERENCE**  
December 6-8, 2021 | DoubleTree Hotel, Bloomington

Find more information on these events at [www.mncounties.org](http://www.mncounties.org).



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# Performance Management: 10 Steps to Guide Difficult Discussions

By Melanie Ault,  
DDA Human Resources, Inc.



Addressing performance issues with a direct report can be a daunting task for supervisors. If the supervisor is unsure how to approach the issue, it might seem easier to avoid bringing it up at all, or not follow through with the responsibility to guide the staff member in correcting and improving their performance. Taking a methodical approach and thoughtfully preparing for difficult performance management discussions will position the supervisor to work through issues effectively and with greater confidence.

Regular performance management will help eliminate the need to have a difficult discussion. When needed, there are 10 basic steps for supervisors to consider when preparing to discuss performance concerns with an employee under their supervision.

As the supervisor practices tackling difficult performance discussions, engaging in these conversations will become easier and the exchanges will flow naturally. Generally, an effective approach can be broken down into these 10 steps:

- 1. Gather the facts.** Do a little digging for more information about your concerns. You'll be better prepared to offer helpful guidance if you can pinpoint what went wrong, what skills could be improved to support more successful performance and discuss how a successful performer would have approached the situation differently.
- 2. Prepare for a productive discussion.** Remain calm and professional. Prepare your talking points. Choose your words carefully.
- 3. Use clear, direct, and neutral language.** Remain respectful and matter-of-fact. Focus on what the employee can do to improve outcomes.
- 4. State the performance issues you have observed.** Clearly articulate behaviors that are not meeting expectations. Stick to facts and actions, not assumptions.
- 5. Describe the impacts on the employee's work product, or how the performance has affected the team's ability to achieve successful outcomes, or how it has affected working relationships.** Doing so increases the likelihood of the employee's buy-in to correct the issue.
- 6. Describe the desired outcome, behavior, or approach. Include a realistic example of an instance needing improvement. Describe the end goal and the employee's role in achieving it.** Talk through better alternatives or approaches leading to high performance. Talk through what a positive outcome looks and feels like to various stakeholders.

- 7. Involve the employee in problem solving, as appropriate to the situation.** Ask the employee what would help them be successful in the job. Listen and consider those ideas when determining the best strategies to support the employee in achieving successful performance. If the employee does not recognize their performance was lacking, be prepared to share your insight and observations and explain your reasoning.
- 8. Discuss how the adjusted behavior and performance will better position the employee to achieve desired outcomes and meet performance expectations.** Present the positive to establish buy-in. Encourage the employee to embrace the challenge before them, devise a strategy to show and/or increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve successful outcomes. Express your support for the employee's success and growth process.
- 9. Articulate practical next steps and set follow-up expectations.** Set out defined and measurable expectations and direction. Guide the employee to productive and successful performance improvement.
- 10. Document the discussion.** Follow up with an email to the employees, summarizing the discussion and laying out the strategies and action steps you discussed. Also document the employee's response, or lack thereof. Your written records may come in handy in the future.

By preparing to conduct the difficult conversation, you are setting your employee up for success. Your employee will have the best chance at understanding there is a gap between what you desire and where they did not meet your expectation, and what to do to support a more successful outcome the next time the staff member encounters that type of situation. When you are being clear, remaining professional, and listening, you'll be able to best identify where there needs to be change and how to effect that change. You'll be strengthening communications and respect, helping the staff member to develop into a contributing member, and easing your need for future intervention.

Avoiding a difficult discussion won't help, so commit to investing the effort to have the deliberate, helpful conversation and guide the staff member in correcting and bettering their performance. Performance management is an ongoing process, not something that is only done when issues emerge. Regularly managing performance can help prevent the need to even have a difficult conversation. ■

A more detailed article and performance management training materials are in the Knowledge Base at [www.amcddahrsupport.com](http://www.amcddahrsupport.com).

## Community-Driven Solutions

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# MACO 2021 Legislative Priorities



By Troy Olsen, MACO Lobbyist, and  
MACO's Legislative Committee Co-Chairs:  
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Legislating and influencing the Legislature from a distance are major challenges this year due to COVID restrictions. However, MACO will continue to be an active participant in the legislative process during the 2021 Legislative Session. The legislative team worked with MACO members for several months on setting priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session. While being mindful of the limitations of legislating during this pandemic, here are some key issues that will receive MACO's attention:

- Change the mandate for publishing full sample ballots and election notices.** Counties can reduce costs and reduce voter confusion by modernizing the way counties communicate election and ballot information.
- Appropriate funds or establish a grant program for clean-up and maintenance expenses counties are required to pay regarding abandoned tax-forfeited "orphan" sites.** Counties currently must use local property tax dollars to clean up sites impacted by pollution, hazardous substances, dilapidated structures, or petroleum tanks, which oftentimes results in unplanned budget issues.
- Ensure continued Department of Revenue and county cooperation when attempting to improve the administration of the property tax system.** The property tax system is complex; before proposing or implementing administrative or statutory changes, the counties' experience and knowledge should be considered.
- Allow early voting throughout the state up to 14 days prior to Election Day using the model of the current in-person seven-day absentee process.** Voters are increasing their use of absentee voting prior to Election Day, and this change simplifies the process and reduces county costs while still ensuring the integrity of the election.

- Support increased fees for transactions to cover all costs for the services now being performed at the deputy registrar offices.** Deputy registrars provide a valuable local service for customers throughout the state and fair compensation is needed to continue to provide these services.
- Reduce the time period for municipal holds and of the DNR classification process for tax-forfeited lands.** Limiting the time for municipal holds of forfeited land and setting a maximum time for the DNR to respond to classification and sale lists will speed up returning tax-forfeited property to the tax rolls or to public uses.
- Support modernization by requiring electronic submissions of well certifications through the Department of Health.** Electronic submission of well certificates by the Department of Health is cost-effective and will lead to efficiencies in operations for counties, the state, and submitters.
- Eliminate felon name-change possibility through the marriage process.** Allowing a name change through the marriage process requires applicants to complete additional work and may result in a potentially unauthorized change, and there are other avenues in current law for a name to be changed outside the marriage process.
- Allow local deputy registrar offices to offer expanded services to customers such as local online purchases, by-mail transactions, or kiosk services.** Deputy registrars want to provide the best customer service possible by meeting customers' needs, and expanded services, such as kiosks, have been used effectively in other states.

MACO supports efforts that simplify, modernize, and make more efficient the operation and administration of county government services. MACO members are committed to providing effective services related to property tax administration, elections, licenses/registrations, vital records, and recording and look for any opportunity to work towards this objective. Our members and membership represent many of the administrative sides of county government and enjoy a healthy relationship with legislators as subject matter experts. Some of our legislative priorities also overlap with the work of AMC's Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government Operations, and our associations will continue to collaborate on those efforts.

We look forward to working with AMC and other groups at the Legislature to further these important items. ■

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## Lots of "Cs"

By Michael Williams, PhD, Stearns County Administrator, MACA Secretary

At the recent AMC conference, author and motivational speaker David Horsager reminded us that leaders need clarity, compassion, character, competency, commitment, connection, contribution, and consistency.

Two other "C" words were appropriately missing from the list – charisma and command/control. While charisma can help a leader express a vision and gain followers, it is not a necessary component of a productive leader. Similarly, while a leader needs to use authority and command/control from time to time, the ability to generate consensus and delegate and monitor for results is more critical to leadership.

However, I suggest Horsager missed another "C" word that describes a ninth component of leadership: circumstance. Leadership exhibits in many forms and presents itself at different times to serve distinct needs. Necessarily then, leadership is circumstantial or situational. This brings to mind two leader friends of mine that have both displayed examples of circumstantial leadership.

Commissioner Jack Murray was the County Board Chair when I was hired as the first county administrator in Becker County, MN. He was a retired State Police Captain with a penchant for detail, control, and good government. At that time, Becker County government was in disarray. For example, the budget was not only out-of-balance but, worse, there was inaccurate accounting, making sound budget analysis impossible for the Board (Becker County folks – this was a long time ago!).

A change in the form of government was Jack's tool to instill some overall management and policymaking by the county board. The Board established a task force to analyze the employment of a professional administrator for the county. In a split vote, the task force made its recommendations and a county administrator was hired. As much as Jack's personality and style wanted to continue to exert strong control and influence, he passed authority to the new administrator as much as possible. Tussles with the Auditor continued, but the basics of the new governance model were put in place and the Board began to take responsibility for policy and vested administrative authority in the new position.

In a similar fashion, Mayor Virgil Herriett in Brookings, SD, was elected after a change in government structure from a Commissioner form to a Council-Manager form. Virgil was quiet and soft-spoken, with years of board-manager experience as the manager (executive) of an electric cooperative. Virgil had strong opinions about everything but, as Mayor, he was laser focused on establishing the new form of government.

Virgil brought in a consulting firm to establish the Carver Model of governance, which clearly places administrative authority (and responsibility for results) with the manager and policy making authority with the elected body. He worked hard at influencing others to establish the new form of government. This was a major change for a city that previously elected five city commissioners each responsible for management and administration of certain areas of policy.

Jack and Virgil had very different personalities, experiences, leadership styles, and communication methods. Each would have acted and behaved differently if not presented with the challenge of facilitating a new form of government. They were willing to provide leadership within the community and the organization to make such profound and effective change. In a way, each gave up some perceived authority and control in exchange for establishing policy authority through an elected body - which is good governance at work.

Consider the contrariness of the Mayor of Perry, IA, when I arrived as its first city administrator. After he had not participated in the interview process, he complained that I moved into "his" office and relegated him to an office in the restroom. What a first day that was!

These three experiences highlight the importance of exceptional elected leadership and sound governance. Jack and Virgil provided superb leadership. They both left their respective organizations better able to handle the complex and controversial issues that continue to confront cities and counties daily.

The circumstances - the context of major organizational change – created a need for a champion of change. Both Jack and Virgil accepted the challenge, even though they were required to lead in a way they never had before. If given the opportunity and faced with circumstances warranting bold vision and action, don't miss your chance to stretch out of your comfort zone to provide your county with the leadership and fortitude worthy of your calling. ■



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## AMC Welcomes New County Officials

The 2020 general election saw 69 new commissioners elected across the state, plus an additional seven who were elected in special elections since the 2018 general election.

AMC was pleased to welcome those new commissioners and about 30 other county elected officials, administrators, and department heads, to the first two sessions of our virtual County Government 101 program in January.

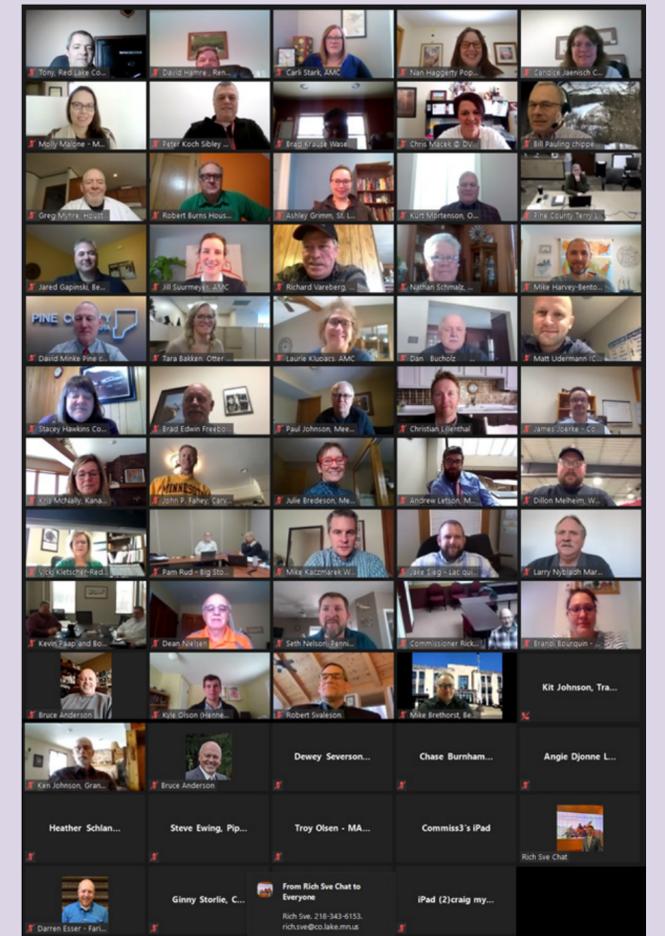
Topics covered in the first session included:

- Keynote Presentation: "The Trust Edge™": How Top Leaders and Organizations Drive Results Through Trust"
- This is AMC
- This is MCIT
- Open Meeting Law: Tips & Traps
- Ethics In Government and a Commissioner's Personal Liability

Additional sessions will be held in February and March. The topics that will be covered in the upcoming sessions include:

- County Government 101
- Transitioning from Campaigning to Governing
- How to Manage Politics on a Non-Partisan Board
- Balancing Your Commissioner Role with Work and Family
- Inside County Government Structure
- Vision: Policy Making vs. Micromanaging
- County Employees: The Role of Professional Staff in a Political Organization
- Lessons Learned So Far as Commissioner

AMC is also tentatively planning an in-person workshop for newly elected officials in July. ■



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