

**GMA  
Research  
Report  
February 2012**



# **A Survival Guide for Newly Elected Municipal Officials**



**4th Edition**

A Georgia Municipal  
Association Publication



# A Survival Guide for Newly Elected Municipal Officials

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Fourth Edition

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By the

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## FOREWORD

The Georgia Municipal Association is pleased to provide **A Survival Guide for Newly Elected Municipal Officials**. This publication has been prepared to assist newly elected officials in becoming more acquainted with their roles and responsibilities as mayors and council members in Georgia. It contains numerous tips to help officials perform their duties and avoid unnecessary pitfalls.

The guide has been prepared in anticipation of the many questions that newly elected municipal officials may have during their first few months in office. We trust that it will be a useful resource as you become more familiar with your city's operations and with the challenges facing your community. We welcome your comments and suggestions for improvements to the publication as you review its content.

We express thanks to Perry Hiott, GMA Director of Research & Redevelopment Services, and to Korey Dickens, GMA Research Associate, for their work in updating this fourth edition of the guide.

Lamar Norton

Executive Director

The publication was originally drafted in 2002 by Perry Hiott, GMA Director of Research & Redevelopment Services. It was updated in 2005 by Patrice Williams, GMA Policy Development Coordinator, with assistance from GMA Research & Federal Relations Manager Becky Taylor and GMA Research Intern Leah Blasingame. It was again updated in 2011 by Perry Hiott and Brandon Fris, GMA Research Intern.

## INTRODUCTION

"It's easier to run for office than to run the office."

*Former House Speaker Tip O'Neill*

Congratulations!

The voters have spoken and you're the candidate they've elected to meet the challenges facing the city and its citizens. You may find your new position to be worlds apart from what you had imagined. Maybe you hadn't considered the amount of time your "part-time" position would take or you hadn't anticipated that your citizens would expect you to solve all their problems, which may include personal issues. Whatever your feelings are, you can rest assured that in time, you will become more knowledgeable regarding the fundamentals of your local government.

Your ability to assist in the operations of your local government will only improve over time. GMA, along with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, is available in helping you become a more effective municipal official.

Many newly elected municipal officials are often apprehensive about their recently acquired responsibilities as public servants. As a practical tool, we have prepared **A Survival Guide for Newly Elected Officials** to assist newly elected municipal officials in understanding their roles and responsibilities.

The publication contains five parts, as follows:

- Part One: Survival Tips for Newly Elected Officials
- Part Two: Purpose, Information and Events
- Part Three: Practical Advice from the Experts – Veteran Municipal Officials
- Part Four: Available Resources
- Part Five: Sample Guidelines and Procedures

## PART ONE

### Survival Tips for Newly Elected Municipal Officials

Listed below are 50 “Survival Tips” for newly elected municipal officials.

- 1. Know what you are getting into.** Becoming an effective municipal elected official will require much time and effort on your part. Most elected officials, regardless of their form of government, will find they are a public servant full time. Expect to spend a significant portion of your time attending to your duties – attending city council meetings and other meetings, reviewing reports and other materials, meeting with constituents, and attending various functions in your official capacity as mayor or council member.

As an elected official, you can expect to be contacted at all hours by citizens – making complaints, seeking assistance, and seeking personal favors.

Additionally, as an elected official, you can plan to give up certain aspects of your privacy. The elected official truly lives in a fishbowl. Accordingly, your actions, however uneventful they may seem, may be subjected to close public scrutiny. Remember that anything you say or do may appear in the newspaper, the evening news, or on the Internet.

- 2. Understand your role as a municipal elected official.** It is very important that all municipal officials, both elected and appointed, understand their roles in the city’s organization. You should clearly understand the roles, lines of authority, and limitations of the following city officials:

The mayor;

The city council;

The city manager or administrator, if any;

The city clerk;

The city attorney;

The city’s department heads.

- 3. Do your homework.** Follow the Scouting motto “Be prepared.” Read your city’s charter and code of ordinances, along with any reports that your city manager, city clerk, and/or department heads may provide. In other words, be prepared and informed before making statements, asking questions, or voting on an issue.

If your city manager or city clerk prepares an agenda packet or staff report for your review prior to each council meeting, be sure to read it carefully. Such reports generally contain background information on items that are scheduled for consideration at the next council meeting. Becoming familiar with this information prior to the council meeting should assist you in making more informed decisions at the meeting.

If your city manager or city clerk does not prepare an agenda packet or staff report prior to each council meeting, you might want to ask that one be developed.

- 4. Familiarize yourself with your city’s operations.** Learn as much as possible about your city’s operations. For example, find out why the city’s sanitation charges are so high, why the city’s recycling participation rates are so low, and/or how much it costs to repair a sidewalk or a pothole. What about wastewater? Do you know what happens to wastewater when someone flushes a toilet in your city? Is your city’s wastewater treatment plant in compliance with applicable regulations?

An examination of the city’s budget will identify the city’s major sources of expenditures and revenues. The city manager, as well as the city’s department heads, can provide valuable information concerning the city’s operations.

Finally, learn as much as you can about the important issues that presently affect your community and surrounding areas. Are there problems with crime, traffic, or water supply?

- 5. Use your perspective.** Once you have become acquainted with your new responsibilities, it is imperative that your new perspective is utilized to better communicate issues with your constituency. Being a freshman, you may have a better understanding of the citizen’s needs and concerns and may be better able to express them to your more “seasoned” colleagues.

- 6. Ask questions.** Don’t be afraid to ask questions. The adage that you learned in first grade, “the only dumb question is the one not asked,” is true. Remember that some elected officials may have more experience, and might not ask as many questions. Also, other elected officials may have the same questions as you but may not be willing to ask them. Don’t let the fear of asking a “dumb” question deter you in your efforts to become a more informed and a more effective elective official.



- 7. Don't make promises you can't keep.** Since legislative decisions require the approval of a majority of the city council, it may be difficult to sell your plan to the numbers of council members needed for passage.

For example, making a promise during the campaign that you will reduce the city's water rates or fire the police chief might help you win the election. However, without the support and affirmative vote of a majority on the city council, such promises may never come to fruition.

- 8. Don't try to please everyone.** It is impossible to please everyone. Accept this fact and move on to more important issues.

- 9. Learn Your Alphabet.** Public hearings on such controversial issues as land use or zoning changes will sometimes fill the council chambers with fearful or angry residents who are opposed to the issue under consideration. Some of these residents may be better characterized by an alphabet soup of acronyms, including the following:

- NIMBYs – Not in My Back Yard
- CAVEs – Citizens Against Virtually Everything
- BANANAs – Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere, Near Anything

Please note that the NIMBYs, CAVEs, and BANANAs can offer valid concerns, and they can also conduct research and provide valuable information that can assist elected officials with their decision-making processes. With a little effort, you should be able to recognize the difference between legitimate concerns and irrational fears. Remember that your job as an elected official is to represent the entire community, not just a particular block or subdivision.

- 10. Try to be as consistent as possible in making decisions.** Consistency is the best policy when making decisions. Be wary of setting precedents and rely strictly on policy.

- 11. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** Even if you "do your homework" and become familiar with your city's operations, as recommended above, it is impossible to know everything about a city's operations, employees, and finances. If a constituent (or anyone else, for that matter) asks you a question and you don't know the answer, have the courage to say so – but offer to find out the answer.

**12. Pace yourself.** It is impossible for you to learn the workings of your government overnight. You may find it difficult to juggle the multiple tasks you have recently inherited, but it is crucial that you allot time in your schedule for studying the issues.

**13. Ask for opinions, and listen.** Listen to everyone, including your adversaries and those having opinions that differ from yours. Be open to new ideas and suggestions.

**14. Draw the line.** Never let differences of political opinions cross over into personal attacks. Respect the seats that your colleagues occupy, and remember that, like yourself, they were elected by the citizens.

**15. Adhere to your city's form of government.** Don't bypass the system. Know your city's charter! It is the city's fundamental law; much like the national or state constitution.

In Georgia, most municipalities have one of the three forms of government: strong mayor-council form, the weak mayor-council form, or the council-manager form. Reading and understanding your city's charter will help you in determining your role as an elected official. If your city's charter and code of ordinances do not provide an administrative role for you in the city's operations, don't meddle in the day-to-day administration of the city.

If your city has a city manager, let that individual serve as a liaison between the city's staff (department heads and others) and the mayor and council. Among the manager's many responsibilities is supervising the city's department heads. This is impossible if the city's department heads and other staff are answering to several bosses (i.e., the mayor and council). Therefore, all complaints from the mayor and council should come through the city manager.

If your role is strictly a legislative one, concentrate on setting policy to the best of your ability, and let your appointed administrative staff perform the jobs that the city is paying them to do – and then hold them accountable.

**16. Insist that others adhere to your city's form of government.** Don't let others – elected officials, city employees, citizens, etc. - bypass the system. Insist that they adhere to your city's established procedures (regarding complaints, personnel issues, etc.). Additionally, insist that vendors, applicants for employment, etc., adhere to the city's established procedures.

**17. Recognize the value of teamwork and consensus building.** City councils whose members work together as a team, respect each others' right to have a different opinion, and "agree to disagree," are probably more effective and can probably accomplish much more than councils whose members spend the majority of their time engaged in grandstanding, fighting, and backstabbing. Remember, you are only but one vote; everything depends on teamwork.

An annual planning retreat provides an excellent opportunity for the mayor and council to get to know each other better and, hopefully, build an effective working team. At this time, you can get to know what type of personalities you are surrounded by, extroverts or introverts. This may help explain the different approaches that your colleagues may take when discussing and reviewing an issue. If your city does not conduct a retreat, you may want to suggest doing so. The use of an experienced facilitator during the retreat is strongly recommended.

**18. Remember that the Council should speak as one voice.** The city council possesses its power as a group. Once a vote is taken, the council has spoken. Once a decision has been made by the city council, try to be supportive of it, even if you personally don't like the decision.

**19. Praise in public, criticize in private.** In order to form great working relationships with the mayor, council, and staff, it is of the utmost importance that you respect them both in public and in private. Don't use the media or public meetings to disrespect your colleagues or staff. People are more likely to receive criticism better in private than in front of an audience.

**20. Gratitude.** Always remember to show your appreciation to your staff for their hard work and dedication to the well-being of the city.

**21. Never engage in gossip.** Do not allow constituents to approach you with rumors concerning the mayor or council. As the Jewish Proverb states, "What you don't see with your eyes, don't witness with your mouth."

**22. Set goals.** Early in life, we learned the importance of setting goals. We also learned the importance of setting realistic goals. Don't expect to conquer the world over night. Even after setting realistic goals, you might not achieve anything you set out to accomplish your first year. Consensus building plays a strong role in whether or not you will be able to achieve your political aspirations.

**23. Try not to reinvent the wheel.** There are actually few new ideas. Your city's most recent innovation has probably already been implemented in other cities. Before beating your head against a wall trying to be creative or innovative, find out what other cities are doing. In addition to learning about other cities' success stories, the "lessons learned" by cities who have experienced problems with various programs or services will be invaluable. Why repeat someone else's mistake, when you can repeat their accomplishments?

**24. Use the resources that are available to you.** Don't panic - help is available! There are numerous organizations and agencies available to assist local governments. Plan to make the best use of these resources.

The Georgia Municipal Association is available to serve you. GMA's Internet website ([www.gmanet.com](http://www.gmanet.com)) and monthly newspaper, *Georgia's Cities*, contain a variety of information on training, legislation, policy issues, and GMA's programs and services. GMA's staff is ready and willing to assist your city.

Additional resources include the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) and Fanning Institute, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and local regional commissions (RCs). Each of these agencies is available to assist cities and can provide a variety of information and services.

**25. Recognize the importance of training.** Take advantage of the excellent training programs available to Georgia's municipal elected officials through the Harold F. Holtz Municipal Training Institute, described in Part Two of this report. These programs provide excellent opportunities for you to network with your peers, exchange ideas, and share common concerns.

Additionally, recognize the importance of training the city's workforce. While state law requires that certain city employees (police officers, fire fighters, water and wastewater treatment operators, etc.) receive training annually, most of the available training opportunities for municipal employees are voluntary.

Some elected officials are reluctant for their cities to spend significant resources on training because they fear that their city might become a "training ground" for employees who may leave the city for better paying jobs elsewhere. Unfortunately, this problem does exist in many communities. However, the benefits of having a trained, professional workforce cannot be overstated. Consider this excellent training motto:

*The only thing worse than training your people and losing them is not training them and keeping them. (Associated General Contractors)*

**26. Practice what you have learned.** Once the class is over, take the information you have gained and apply that knowledge to your everyday life. By using the information, you will be able to perform at a higher level; therefore showing others the importance of municipal training.

**27. Learn from other experienced officials.** Identify an experienced and wise city official (not necessarily from your own city) who would be willing to serve as a mentor. It is strongly encouraged that you form relationships with municipal officials throughout the state, especially those with similar populations and who are facing some of the same issues that your city faces. It is also important that city officials look to other cities that have accomplished the goals that they are now trying to attain. Receiving quality advice from city officials, regardless of your time in office, could possibly prevent you and your colleagues from making needless errors.

**28. Review and understand the Georgia Open Meetings Law.** If you never understand any other laws, make sure that you are familiar with this one.

Knowingly and willfully participating in a meeting that violates the Open Meetings Act is punishable as a misdemeanor and can result in a fine of up to \$500. Also, keep in mind that the Georgia Attorney General has the power to bring a civil or criminal action to enforce compliance with the Open Meetings Act. Additionally, any person, firm, corporation or other entity can sue to require you to comply with the Open Meetings Act. Finally, violations of the Open Meetings Act are grounds for filing a recall petition against an elected official.

The GMA publication, Government in the Sunshine, is available on GMA's Internet website at [www.gmanet.com](http://www.gmanet.com).

**29. Avoid conflicts of interest.** As an elected official, you should recognize when you have a legitimate conflict of interest, so that you will be sure to disqualify yourself and not vote on the particular issue at hand. Under O.C.G.A. §36-30-6, it is illegal for a member of a city council to vote on any question brought before the council in which he or she is personally interested.

You should also be familiar with the Conflict of Interest in Zoning Actions Act. (O.C.G.A. §36-67A-1 et seq.) Under this Act, disclosures of financial interests in property subject to a zoning action are required, and failure to disclose may constitute a crime.

Please note, however, that a council member should only abstain from voting on an issue if he or she has a legitimate conflict of interest, not to avoid voting on a controversial issue.

**30. Stay focused.** Your constituents expect you to perform the job they elected you to do. Do not lose sight of your commitment to your community. You will be bombarded with requests, from family, friends, associates, and business leaders, which, may or may not be ethical. However, remember, the voters trusted you to represent their well-being, and ultimately, you will be the only one who has to answer to your electorate.

**31. Recognize the importance of intergovernmental relations.** Interaction with other governmental officials at the local, state, and national levels can be extremely important to your city. At the local level, it is important that your city communicate with other city and county officials. In fact, the Georgia Service Delivery Law for Local Governments requires cities and counties to work together to develop a service delivery strategy for the entire county.

Effective communication with state legislators is also important, as the General Assembly annually passes numerous pieces of legislation that impact local governments. While the Georgia Municipal Association has a legislative staff that can give state lawmakers the facts about how an issue will affect cities, it is from you, a fellow elected official (and their constituent), that legislators learn how proposed legislation might affect the citizens “back home.”

How can city officials lobby effectively with their state legislators? While personal interaction is usually the best approach, it is often difficult to personally meet with your legislator during the legislative session. However, telephone calls, emails, and faxes are effective methods of communicating with your legislators.

**32. Communicate!** Remember, communication is the key to any healthy relationship. Don’t be afraid to express your concerns or feelings regarding an issue. However, when speaking to others, always remember to be polite. Like the saying goes, “You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.”

**33. Don’t forget your constituents.** Once upon a time you were a constituent. It is important that you remember the level of respect you demanded as a voter. Your constituency expects you to understand their problems and issues and to be genuinely concerned about their well-being. Never forget who put you in office, because they will not forget you on Election Day.

**34. Live up to your official responsibilities.** Since being elected to office, you probably have gained a better appreciation for those that serve. Attending every event you are invited to may be

impossible. It is, however, strongly suggested that you attend every council meeting scheduled during your tenure.

- 35. Seek feedback from constituents.** Remember to seek out answers from your constituents by making personal calls, attending backyard barbeques, community picnics, and/or making house calls. They expect you to vote to protect their needs and their community for generations to come.
  
- 36. Contact information.** Let your constituents know the best means of contacting you (fax, e-mail, social media, snail mail or phone). Always remember that you were elected to represent the public, rather than to hide from them.
  
- 37. Always respond to the voter.** As an elected official, it is your responsibility to respond to any phone calls, letters, emails, or faxes you may receive from your constituents. It may be time consuming, but in the end, the voters will applaud you for your effort and your willingness to attend to their needs and concerns.
  
- 38. Never let them see you sweat.** At some point during your term, you may find yourself being attacked by the mayor, councilmembers, voters or reporters. But remember, it is always better to take the high road. As a public official, you have become a role model for your entire community. You should remain level headed at all times. People are watching, and that includes the future leaders of your community.
  
- 39. When in doubt, go for modesty.** According to Webster's Dictionary, *modesty* means "freedom from conceit or vanity." The people elected you as mayor or to the city council because they felt a connection to you and your vision for the city. If they perceive that you have changed and your behavior is no longer in line with your performance as a candidate, they may lose faith in you. You may possibly become just another "politician" in their eyes and not the public servant they elected. When serving the people, always remain a humble servant.
  
- 40. Be specific.** Once you have learned the issues affecting your city, it is your responsibility to articulate the needs of the city to your state legislators. It is important that you help them to understand where your city stands on each individual issue so that they may vote or act accordingly.

- 41. It's not about getting even!** Remember that speeding ticket you received prior to taking office? Well, this is not the time to get even. Do not use your new role to make political or personal attacks on anyone you feel wronged you before or after taking office.
- 42. Remember why you ran for office and whom you serve.** Remember to not get caught up in all the hype. As an elected official, your sole responsibility is to serve the people to the best of your ability. You obviously ran for office because you believed that you had something good to offer to the people. Now that you're in office, the people expect you to work solely for the betterment of their community.
- 43. Act in an ethical manner.** Many elected officials are confronted with ethical dilemmas daily. City officials are encouraged to take the Ethics course offered by the Harold E. Holtz Municipal Training Institute. In taking this course, officials will have a better understanding on what approach is best taken when facing these sometimes unavoidable situations.
- 44. Do the right thing.** Always strive to do the right thing, regardless of popularity. Remember that which is right is not always popular, and that which is popular is not always right.
- 45. Consult with and follow the advice of the city attorney.** We cannot over-emphasize the importance of talking to your city attorney before addressing the complex issues impacting your city.
- 46. Work with your media outlets.** Inform the newspaper and other media of every possible thing you are doing and get their feedback and input. Invite them to your work sessions and include them in the decision-making. If they are a part of it, they can't complain.
- 47. Choose only a couple of things to work on at a time.** Do them well but have only a few major initiatives at a time.
- 48. Be a leader, not just a politician.** Remember the adage – “a politician looks to the next election, a leader looks to the next generation.”



**49. Recognize that controversy is inevitable at times.** How you choose to deal with controversy will be an important measure of your effectiveness as an elected official. Remember to focus on the real issues, and do not make promises that you cannot keep.

**50. Try to have fun!** Public service is hard work, but there are no rules against having a good time. Make a concerted effort to enjoy your term in office. Otherwise, it may be the longest period of your life. Try to maintain your sense of humor, and don't take yourself too seriously. Additionally, take pride in the fact that you will have a hand and a voice in the future development of your community. There is no greater reward in public service than knowing that you helped to make a difference in your community!

## PART TWO

### Purpose, Information and Events

“Our purpose is to anticipate and influence the forces shaping Georgia's communities and to provide leadership, tools and services that assist local governments in becoming more innovative, effective and responsive.”

*The Georgia Municipal Association*

#### Purpose

**GMA's Legislative Tracking** - GMA encourages you to visit its Legislative Session web page, <http://www.gmanet.com/LegislativeSession>, to keep up with all the bills GMA is working on during the session. Links to recently updated bills, local bills, legislative news stories and GMA's Legislative Alerts can be accessed from this page. It is updated daily and allows users to search for bills by bill number, keyword, subject area and when last updated. Visitors to the site can also create a profile of bills to track.

**Hometown Connection** - From recent legislative sessions, we've learned that too many of our legislators don't know enough about what city officials do and the hard choices you make everyday. GMA's Hometown Connection is a way for city officials to reach out and connect with their House and Senate members and fix this informational gap. Invite them to your city to show them what is going on in your community and to talk about the challenges and opportunities you and your citizens face. The Hometown Connection is based on the simple premise that the relationship between city officials and legislators is vital to cities and to the advancement of Georgia. If your city is willing to participate in the Hometown Connection, please contact [Kwame Som-Pimpong](#), GMA Legislative Policy & Outreach Coordinator, at 678-651-1038.

#### Information

**Handbook for Georgia Mayors and Councilmembers** - The Handbook for Georgia Mayors and Councilmembers, Online Edition, has been created to increase access to the information that is needful for effective municipal governance. In order for elected and appointed municipal officials to be effective in serving their communities, a proper understanding of municipal administration is indispensable. The Georgia Municipal Association is pleased to help shape that understanding through a variety of courses offered in conjunction with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, including the Newly Elected Officials Institute. This resource has also been prepared for the purpose of aiding officials with their

understanding the municipal process. Access to this publication can be achieved through the following link: <http://www.gmanet.com/Handbook.aspx>.

**LOST Renegotiation** - The local option sales tax (LOST) is a 1 percent sales tax activated by a local referendum and imposed on the purchase, sale, rental, storage, use, or consumption of tangible personal property and related services. LOST is a special district tax. State law (O.C.G.A. §48-8-81) creates 159 special districts in Georgia for the purpose of levying a LOST. The boundaries of the special districts are the same as the boundaries of the 159 counties in Georgia. State law requires periodic renegotiation of the LOST distribution certificate. One trigger for renegotiation of the tax is the decennial census. With the release of the 2010 Census data, all counties and municipalities that currently impose a LOST are required to renegotiate the distribution certificate for the proceeds of the tax on or before July 1, 2012. More information regarding the renegotiation of the distribution of this tax can be found in the LOST Resources section of the GMA website, [www.gmanet.com/LOST.aspx](http://www.gmanet.com/LOST.aspx).

**Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)** – The SPLOST is a voter-approved 1 percent sales and use tax for voter-approved capital outlay projects that is imposed on the purchase, sale, rental, storage, use, or consumption of tangible personal property and related services. The tax is collected by the Georgia Department of Revenue and disbursed to the county. One percent of the amount collected is paid into the general fund of the state treasury to pay for administration costs. SPLOST is a special district tax, and it may be used to fund municipal projects. Funding of municipal projects may be determined through one of two processes: through an intergovernmental agreement or through a default distribution that is based on population and project types. The SPLOST is a time-limited tax. Generally, the duration of the SPLOST is limited by the process of selecting projects and the types of projects selected, but with the exception of consolidated governments, the maximum time for which a SPLOST may be called is six (6) years. For more information about the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, please see the Handbook for Georgia Mayors and Councilmembers, Section “Municipal Revenues,” at <http://www.gmanet.com/Handbook.aspx>. Also, please see the GMA publication entitled “SPLOST: Building for the Future” located at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx?CNID=19957>.

**Immigration** - The Georgia General Assembly passed legislation during the 2011 Legislative Session that expanded the scope of Georgia’s cities responsibilities to comply with the federal work authorization program, currently known as E-Verify, and with the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program.

E-Verify is a federal program operated by the United States Department of Homeland Security designed to verify the employment eligibility information of newly hired employees. E-Verify will require your city to renew its password every two months, so it is important to log-in to the E-Verify program on occasion to ensure that your password is up to date, even if your city has not done any hiring.

SAVE is a federal program used to verify that applicants for certain “public benefits” are legally present in the United States. The Attorney General of Georgia is tasked with creating a list of applicable “public benefits” each year and such list can be found on the Department of Law's website. SAVE registration requires the completion of three documents, a Memorandum of Agreement, an Addendum to that Memorandum of Agreement, and an Anticipated Collections Addendum. The Anticipated Collections Addendum will need to be renewed yearly, based upon your fiscal year. The SAVE program will send a reminder to the registered email address forty-five (45) days before the end of your fiscal year that the Anticipated Collections Addendum needs to be renewed.

There are many requirements created by Georgia’s immigration laws and it is important that city officials and employees understand their responsibilities under the law. Penalties for failing to comply with Georgia’s immigration laws could include fines of up to \$10,000, criminal prosecution, removal from office and loss of qualified local government status. To learn more about the requirements of the immigration laws, please visit the GMA website, <http://www.gmanet.com/MDR.aspx?CNID=42442>.

**Ethics Filing** - Candidates for municipal office are required to file campaign contribution and expenditure disclosure reports with the Georgia Government Transparency and Campaign Finance Commission. In each nonelection year, the reports must be filed on June 30 and December 31. In each election year, the reports must be filed on March 31, June 30, September 30, October 25, and December 31 as well as six days before any run-off in which the candidate is listed on the ballot. If the candidate is listed on the ballot for a special run-off or special election, a report must be filed 15 days prior to that run-off or election. Georgia has moved to an almost exclusively electronic reporting system. Public officers, candidates and their campaign committees must file electronically upon having raised or spent \$20,000.00 or more in an election cycle. However, all filers are encouraged to file electronically to ensure that their reports are received in a timely fashion by the Commission. For each campaign disclosure report that is filed late, the Commission will impose a late fee of \$125.00. An additional late fee of \$250.00 will be imposed on the fifteenth day after the due date and yet another late fee of \$1,000.00 will be imposed on the forty-fifth day after the report was due.

In addition to campaign finance disclosures, municipal elected officials and candidates for such offices must file personal financial disclosure reports with the Commission. For officials holding office, such reports must be filed between January 1 and July 1 of each non-election year; all municipal candidates for office must file no later than 15 days after qualifying to run for office. Late filing of personal financial disclosure reports is subject to the same schedule of late fees applicable to campaign disclosure reports.

For more information about Ethics in Municipal Governments, please see the Handbook for Georgia Mayors and Councilmembers, Section “Ethics, Conflict of Interest, and Abuse of Office,” at <http://www.gmanet.com/Handbook.aspx>.

## Events

**Mayors' Day** - The Mayors' Day Conference is held each year in Atlanta in late January. While titled "Mayors' Day", the conference is actually open to all elected officials and city staff. This conference usually has an attendance of approximately 1,000 and focuses on legislative issues. The first day of the conference is a training day with multiple courses offered. The GMA Policy Committees meet the second day, followed by a meeting of the Legislative Policy Council. On the final morning, the Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker of the House and other legislators provide a briefing on legislative issues that will be discussed during the current legislative session. Each GMA District also meets to discuss legislative issues that will specifically affect the district.

**Georgia Cities Week** - Georgia Cities Week is an annual event held every April that is designed to raise public awareness of the services cities provide and the role they play in providing great quality of life. GMA provides a resource kit to help cities get started, but the activities are all uniquely local and tailored to each individual community. Activities include adopting resolutions for Georgia Cities Week, art contests, local "If I were mayor, I would" essay contests, job shadowing, clean up activities and tours of city facilities and equipment.

**GMA Annual Convention** - The GMA Annual Convention is held in Savannah in late June. This convention is a four day program (Saturday through Tuesday) with a variety of training sessions being offered on the first and final day. On Sunday and Monday, policy committees meet to develop the preliminary legislative platform for the following year. A number of general sessions and concurrent sessions are also held through which cities are able to share their best practices in various areas. Also, more than 175 exhibitors showcase their programs and services in the Exhibition Hall. Attendance at this convention is typically over 2,000.

**Mayors' Christmas Motorcade** - GMA began the Mayors' Christmas Motorcade in 1958 at the request of then-Governor Ernest Vandiver as a way of providing holiday gifts for the patients of Georgia's mental health and retardation hospitals. The program is also aimed at raising the awareness of the needs of Georgia's mental hospitals. There are currently seven regional mental health hospitals in the state, serving some 3,200 Georgians. Many of these clients have lived in the hospital facility for much of their lives and receive little, if any, support from their families. Without the Mayors' Christmas Motorcade, the staff at these hospitals have told us, many of their clients would not receive a gift for the holidays. The Christmas spirit demonstrated by cities during the Motorcade extends beyond the holiday season. Any gifts not handed out during Christmas are used for client birthdays or given to newly arrived clients, who may need many of the items. In this way, cities help the hospitals celebrate special occasions year-round and help the hospitals meet the needs of their clients.

## PART THREE

### Practical Advice from the Experts:

#### Veteran Municipal Officials

Who can better give advice to newly elected officials than experienced elected officials? These “veterans” know the ropes – they have been in the trenches, and most of them have encountered the same types of problems that you will soon encounter (if you haven’t encountered them already) as municipal elected officials.

GMA asked four mayors to answer the following question:

***What advice can you give to newly elected mayors and council members so that they might become effective municipal elected officials?***

Listed below are the responses received from these mayors.

“Little can be accomplished in government without help. Be a team player. Help build a team, and help the team achieve its goals. If you help others to achieve their goals and look good, they will help you in return.”

*- Jere Wood, Mayor, City of Roswell*

“Listen to your constituents. Think things through carefully. Try not to make hasty decisions. Don’t promise more than you can accomplish. Don’t become discouraged by complainers – you will never please everyone.”

*- Al Hoyle, Mayor, City of Ellijay*

“Each of you will have a choice about your leadership style as an elected official. May I encourage you to adopt a servant-enabler style. We are elected to serve, not to dictate. We do not seek power, but to empower others. In addition, each of us should dedicate ourselves to enable our community to have its ‘finest hour’ during our tenure.”

*- John Stumbo, Mayor, City of Fort Valley*

“I, personally, feel all newly elected officials should concentrate on accomplishing as much as possible during their allotted term; with little or no consideration of being re-elected. Too many officials are trying to figure out how to get re-elected before they are given the oath of office. Do a good job and do what is right and let the chips fall where they may.”

*-Hays Arnold, Mayor, Thomaston*

Additionally, GMA asked four city managers to answer the following question:

***How do you help a newly elected mayor or council member become oriented with the city's operations after they take office?***

Listed below are the responses received from these city managers.

“This procedure is specifically used for city council members, as our Mayor is elected from the Council by the Council membership and usually has many years of experience. Usually, a new council member will take his/her seat in January, immediately following the end of our budget year. Using the newly adopted budget as a guide I usually go through each departmental area as an overview. The mayor immediately assigns the new council member to several committees so he/she will have an opportunity to meet with department heads and begin to see a global view of those areas. Since we have very little council turnover, our council members become very knowledgeable with time.”

*-Tom Berry, City Manager, Thomasville – Retired*

“We actually start the orientation prior to the new members taking office. An elected official needs to be prepared from day one to make sound decisions based on the best available information. The volume of information is so great that we would be way behind the power curve if we waited until they took office. Therefore we start the orientation process as soon as possible after the election. It has been said that we give them so much information in such a brief period of time that they feel like they're taking a drink of water from a fire hose. This comment underscores the amount of information they are given and therefore the importance of starting early.”

*-Billy Edwards, City Administrator, Hinesville*



“A useful orientation for a newly elected councilperson consists of a personal visit to each department or major function within the city. A short course on finances – where the dollars come from (sources) – and where they go (uses) – is helpful. A briefing on the *role* of the elected official and the *role* of the management staff provides a good initial briefing. This is only the beginning.”

*-Carlyle Cox, City Manager, Gainesville – Retired*

### ***Ten Points for Success***

1. Establish mutual respect for other elected officials and staff.
2. Establish mutual trust for other elected officials and staff.
3. Establish goals, priorities, and expectations.
4. Elected officials should set the example of honesty and integrity in all actions.
5. Conduct all public meetings with order and dignity.
6. Establish standard procedures for handling citizen complaints.
7. Avoid public confrontations with staff.
8. Do not expect staff to referee disagreements between elected officials.
9. Establish job descriptions and standard personnel procedures for hiring, firing, and discipline.
10. Evaluate staff at least once per year.

*- John Bennett, City Manager, Rome*

## **PART FOUR**

### **Available Resources**

*Listed below are available resources for newly elected municipal officials, including suggested reading materials and Internet websites.*

#### ***SUGGESTED READING MATERIALS FROM YOUR CITY***

1. City Charter.
2. Code of Ordinances.
3. Annual Budget.
4. Minutes from previous city council meetings.
5. Annual Audit or Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).
6. Personnel Policies.
7. Code of Ethics.
8. Strategic Plan.

## *RESOURCES*

### **Georgia Municipal Association (GMA)**

Post Office Box 105377  
Atlanta, Georgia 30348  
Phone: 404-688-0472 or 888-488-4462

[www.gmanet.com](http://www.gmanet.com)

### **Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG)**

50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 1000  
Atlanta GA 30303  
Phone: 404-522-5022 or 800-858-2224  
Fax: 404-525-2477

[www.accg.org](http://www.accg.org)

### **Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG)**

The University of Georgia  
  
201 North Milledge Avenue  
Athens, GA 30602-5482  
Phone: (706) 542-2736  
Fax: (706) 542-9301

[www.cviog.uga.edu](http://www.cviog.uga.edu)

### **Fanning Institute**

A Unit of Public Service and Outreach at the University of Georgia

1240 South Lumpkin Street  
Athens, GA 30602-3552  
Phone: 706-542-1108  
Fax: 706-542-1744

[www.fanning.uga.edu](http://www.fanning.uga.edu)

### **Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)**

60 Executive Park South, N.E.

Atlanta, GA 30329

Phone: (404) 679-4940

Fax: (404) 679-0589

[www.dca.ga.gov](http://www.dca.ga.gov)

### **Georgia Local Government Access (GLGA)**

Contact GMA or ACCG

[www.glga.org](http://www.glga.org)

### **Governing Magazine**

1100 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Suite 1300,

Washington, DC 20036

Phone: (202) 862-8802

Fax: (202) 862-0032

[www.governing.com](http://www.governing.com)

### **Library of Congress Legislative Information**

101 Independence Ave, SE

Washington, DC. 20540

Phone: (202) 707-5000

<http://thomas.loc.gov>

### **National Association of Counties (NACO)**

440 First Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20001

Phone: (202) 393-6226

[www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)

**National Civic League (NCL)**

National Headquarters  
1445 Market St. Suite 300  
Denver, CO 80202  
Phone: (303) 571-4343  
Fax: (303) 571-4404

[www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org)

**National League of Cities (NLC)**

1301 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Suite 550  
Washington, DC 20004  
Phone: (202) 626-3000  
Fax: (202) 626-3043

[www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org)

**State of Georgia**

Office of the Governor  
Georgia State Capitol  
Atlanta, GA 30334  
Office Phone: 404-656-1776

[www.georgia.gov](http://www.georgia.gov)

***COMMONLY-USED ACRONYMS***

Listed below are commonly used acronyms for state and federal agencies, professional associations, and grant programs affecting municipal governments in Georgia. This list is not all-inclusive.

ACCG                      Association County Commissioners of Georgia

APA	American Planning Association
APWA	American Public Works Association
CAFR	Comprehensive Annual Financial Report
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CVIOG	Carl Vinson Institute of Government (University of Georgia)
DCA	Georgia Department of Community Affairs
DNR	Georgia Department of Natural Resources
DOR	Georgia Department of Revenue
DOT	Georgia Department of Transportation
EPD	Environmental Protection Division (of Georgia DNR)
EPA	U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GCCMA	Georgia City-County Management Association
GDEcD	Georgia Department of Economic Development
GEFA	Georgia Environmental Finance Authority
GEMA	Georgia Emergency Management Agency
GFOA	Government Finance Officers Association
GGFOA	Georgia Government Finance Officers Association
GIRMA	Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency
GLGA	Georgia Local Government Access ( <a href="http://www.glga.org">www.glga.org</a> )
GMA	Georgia Municipal Association
GMA WCSIF	GMA Worker's Compensation Self-Insurance Fund
GMC-FOA	Georgia Municipal Clerks and Finance Officers Association
GMEBS	Georgia Municipal Employee Benefit System
GPSTC	Georgia Public Safety Training Center

GRPA	Georgia Recreation and Park Association
GRTA	Georgia Regional Transportation Authority
ICMA	International City/County Management Association
IIMC	International Institute of Municipal Clerks
LDF	Local Development Fund (Grant)
LGRMS	Local Government Risk Management Services
MAMA	Metro Atlanta Mayors' Association
MEAG	Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia
MGAG	Municipal Gas Authority of Georgia
NIGP	National Institute of Governmental Purchasing
NLC	National League of Cities
POST	Peace Officers Standards and Training Council
RMEBS	Risk Management and Employee Benefit Services
RAC	Regional Advisory Council
RC	Regional Commission

## PART FIVE

### Sample Orientation Guidelines and Procedures

#### City of Hinesville

#### Orientation for Candidates/New Council Members

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- Invite candidates/new council members to tour the city and its facilities.
- Invite them to meet with key staff between election and taking office.
- Provide summaries (two pages) of each department.
- Provide information on projects, employees, major issues, etc.
- Provide information on parliamentary procedure.
- Encourage newly elected officials to attend a council meeting during interim.
- Orient new officials on personnel issues (procedures, roles).
- Provide list of committees and boards, including information on:
  - Members
  - Terms
  - Purpose



- Provide information on training requirements for newly elected officials.
- Provide copy of GMA Code of Ethics.
- Provide copy of city's financial report.
- Provide summary information on major policy documents, including:
  - ❑ Comprehensive Plan
  - ❑ Budget (provide copy)
  - ❑ Personnel Policy
  - ❑ Zoning Ordinance
  - ❑ Subdivision Regulations
- Discuss open meetings/open records laws.
- Discuss how the agenda is prepared, organized, and distributed.
- Provide copies of the city's Code of Ordinances.
- Provide the same information to all candidates when requested by one.
- Invite the candidates in for individual discussions (with the City Manager and Assistant Manager).

*(Source: Billy Edwards, City Manager, City of Hinesville)*

## City of Rome

### Points to Improve Mayor and Council Relationships with Staff

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- Council members should let staff know what is their preferred method of communication (written reports or memos, telephone calls, person-to-person contact, etc.)
- Ask questions when you do not understand.
- Listen to other council members, staff, and the public carefully.
- Look for solutions that are the consensus of staff and council and not just a majority vote. Avoid winner/loser situations, and work for win/win solutions, if possible.
- Do not assume everyone agrees just because no one says anything.
- Do not be afraid to admit that you or the city can make a mistake. One of our former chairmen once said: “There is nothing more pitiful than a politician trying to justify a mistake.”

*(Source: John Bennett, City Manager, City of Rome)*

## APPENDIX A

### Other Suggested Reading Materials

**A Reporter's Guide to City Hall**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx>.

**City Government in Georgia** (Athens: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, 1980), Mary A. Hepburn, Gail Karwoski, Ann Blum.

**Georgia's Cities** newspaper, published monthly by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Paper.aspx>.

**Georgia Model Municipal Charter**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx>.

**Government in the Sunshine: A Guide to Georgia's Open Meetings and Open Records Laws for Municipal Officials**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx>.

**Growing Cities, Growing Georgia: A Guide to Georgia's Annexation Law**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx>.

**Handbook for Georgia Mayors and Council Members (Online Edition)**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association in cooperation with the Carl Vinson Institute and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Handbook.aspx>.

**Model Code of Ethics for Georgia City Officials**, published by the Georgia Municipal Association and available at <http://www.gmanet.com/Publications.aspx>.

### **About GMA**

Created in 1933, the Georgia Municipal Association is the only state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. Based in Atlanta, GMA is a voluntary, non-profit organization that provides legislative advocacy, educational, employee benefit, and technical consulting services to its members. GMA's membership currently includes 512 municipal governments, accounting for more than 99% of the state's municipal population.