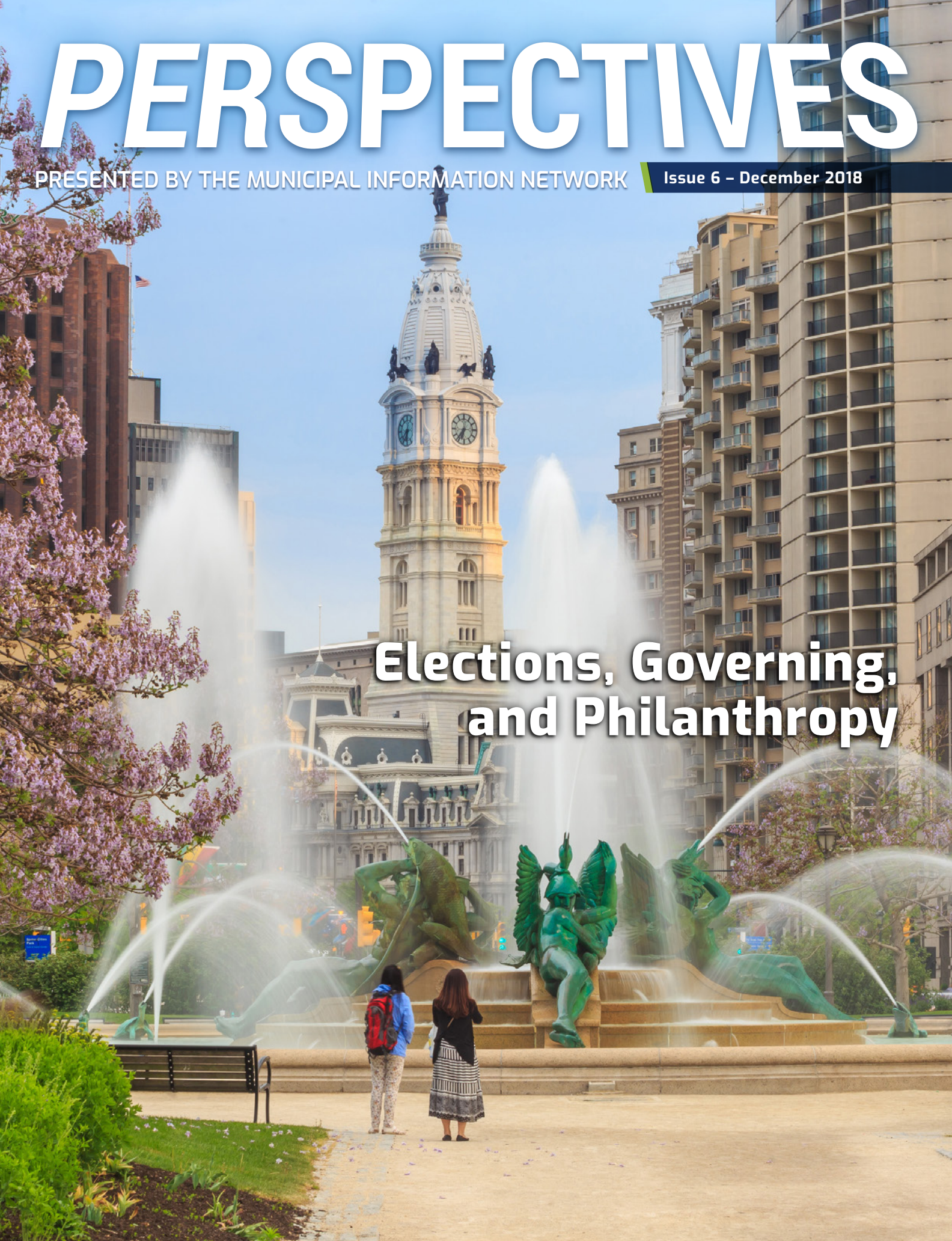


PERSPECTIVES

PRESENTED BY THE MUNICIPAL INFORMATION NETWORK

Issue 6 – December 2018

Elections, Governing, and Philanthropy

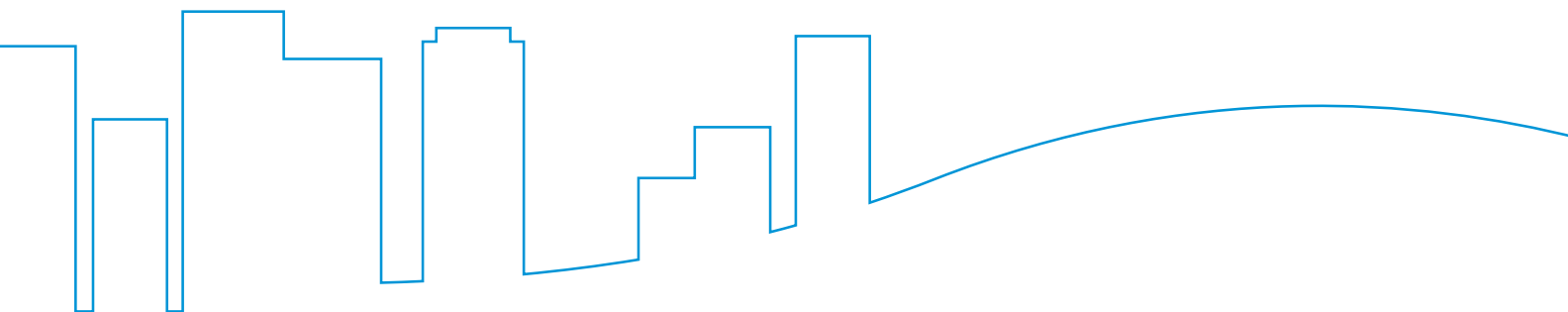




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From the Editor's Desk

GORD HUME

This is an eclectic issue of PERSPECTIVES this month that we hope you will find enjoyable and a little provocative.

We've carefully curated several interesting articles and original commentary into this edition.

The treatment of persons with a disability is one of the critical areas for municipal government, and the federal government has just introduced the new Accessible Canada Act. Parliamentary Secretary Kate Young has written an exclusive article for PERSPECTIVES on this important new initiative that will impact local governments across the country. You need to understand this bill.

Other interesting articles this month include a US report on philanthropy and cities. Philanthropic efforts in Canada have generally focused on health, medical research, education and certain community or cultural venues. Those are all noble and deserving. However, one of the big differences between Canadian and American cities is the major contributions by philanthropists to specific local issues and opportunities in US cities.

Examples would be how foundations and individuals came forward after Detroit's bankruptcy to make big contributions to rejuvenating that city; large private donations to Dallas to remake their thriving arts and cultural centres and the downtown; and any number of other examples of the private sector stepping forward to invest in blighted neighbourhoods or to spark community or downtown regeneration projects, as is happening these days in Tampa.

This is an area that Canadian municipalities should be encouraging, and the article we present on philanthropy will intrigue you.

So will the article on cities that depend too much on fines and fees, and the story about a 'pop-up' highway.

With the latest round of municipal elections in several provinces just finished, winners are being sworn-in to their important new positions. But what about those people who ran and didn't make it? PERSPECTIVES asked Angela Gravelle, a first-time candidate for Deputy Mayor in Innisfil, Ontario, to write about her experiences and feelings about her campaign. It is a deeply personal and thoughtful article.

Finally, this marks the end of the first year of PERSPECTIVES. We want to thank all of our readers for your interest, comments and reaction. The e-magazine has proven to be very popular, and in the year ahead we will continue to bring you interesting articles and unique commentary about issues of importance to Canadian municipal leaders.

We invite you to contact us at anytime with comments or suggestions or your own article about your municipality or issues you're facing. Just email us at: perspectives@municipalinfonet.com

Putting the magazine together requires a lot of work from several people, and as Editor I am only the ringmaster (or ring leader!). I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work of my colleague Tarah McCormick who is the creative light whose skills and dedication put together each magazine for you.

From all of us at PERSPECTIVES, we wish you a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and a fabulous 2019.

GORD HUME



On the Path towards a Barrier-Free Canada

KATE YOUNG

The statistics tell a disturbing story. Only 49 percent of Canadians with a disability have a job, compared to 79 percent of Canadians without a disability. And even for disabled Canadians who are lucky enough to find work, they earn 44 percent less than Canadians without a disability, forcing many into poverty. This is unacceptable.

The challenges faced by people with disabilities from the moment they get up in the morning to the moment they go to sleep at night is daunting to say the least. Physically getting to a job is only half the battle. While some provinces are moving forward with legislation to address accessibility issues, up until this year there has been nothing at the federal level. If this legislation before Parliament is passed, this will change.

The federal government has introduced the new Accessible Canada Act: Bill C-81, An Act to Ensure a Barrier-Free Canada. Over the last 3 years, our government spent time listening to Canadians who have both visible and invisible disabilities. We held the largest consultation on this topic in the history of Canada, meeting with more than 6,000 people and over 90 organizations. As a result, we learned about the real issues surrounding accessibility in our country, which guided the preparations of Bill C-81.

Once passed, Bill C-81 will apply to organizations under federal jurisdiction, and one of the priority areas of the bill is the development and implementation of new accessibility standards. One way the bill proposes to do this is to create the Canadian Accessibility Standards Development

Organization. Not only is this innovative organization the first of its kind, but its board of directors would be made up of a majority of people with disabilities. This underscores the importance of the disability community and persons with disabilities needing to be involved in the creation and implementation of the policies and programs that affect their lives. In other words, “nothing about us without us.”

Up until this point, it has been the responsibility of persons with disabilities to take the initiative and file complaints with authorities about barriers to accessibility, with the hope that it would lead to results. This is now changing with this bill; organizations under federal jurisdiction will now be responsible for the implementation and equality of accessible practices. It will no longer be up to Canadians with disabilities to fix the system. We want to ensure that barriers are eliminated before they become problems.

This is certainly a step in the right direction. In addition to Bill C-81, there needs to be a change in the culture which surrounds persons with disabilities. In other words, there needs to be an increased social awareness of their needs and the barriers which they face. Too often, the social attitudes towards disabilities, in and of themselves, add to the already existing barriers that persons with disabilities face. In fact, organizations under federal jurisdiction represent a large portion of public space in the country and employ nearly a million Canadians. This being the case, these organizations can have a major impact on the culture change that is needed.





At the local level, municipalities play an integral role in providing equal treatment to persons with disabilities when developing policies. From information supports, to building codes and the design of public spaces, municipalities of the future must be accessible for all. But you can't do it alone. It's imperative that all three levels of government work together to make Canada more accessible.

A disability, whether visible or invisible, can be hindering if not appropriately addressed in any area of life. There is still much left to be done to create a Canada that is truly accessible and inclusive. Yet, by making accessibility a priority, we will produce results that are practical and possible for everyone. Together, we will propel our country forward to becoming truly inclusive of all Canadians.

Kate Young was first elected Member of Parliament for London West in October 2015. She is the Parliamentary Secretary for Science and Sport; and the Parliamentary Secretary for Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility (Accessibility). She has also served as the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport.

Prior to being elected, Kate had a lengthy career in journalism and public relations in both the private and public sector. Best known as the first female news anchor at CFPL-TV in London, Kate was also the Manager of Public Affairs and Community Relations for the Thames Valley District School Board and Manager of Community Relations at TD Financial Group.

As a community organizer, Kate has volunteered much of her free time with organizations that directly impact London West, including the London Health Sciences Foundation Board of Directors, the Fanshawe College Board of Directors, and the Museum London Board of Directors. In 2007, London City Press Club named Kate *Newsmaker of the Year* for her outstanding service to the London community.

Kate has a diploma in Journalism (Broadcast) from Fanshawe College and is the proud mother of two children. She is also a grandma to twin boys. Kate grew up in London West, attended Westminster Secondary School, and continues to live in the riding with her partner Brian.



Philanthropy's Real Value to the Public Sector

It can catalyze government to take risks, move quickly and pay attention to neglected issues.

FEATHER O'CONNOR HOUSTOUN

The passing of Philadelphia philanthropist H.F. Lenfest in September after decades of generosity to his city seemed to leave a particularly big hole. His philanthropy was capped by his role in forestalling the further decline of the storied *Philadelphia Inquirer* when, after becoming the newspaper's sole owner following a decade of financial and ownership turmoil, he deeded it to an endowed nonprofit institute.

In addition to helping to modernize the *Inquirer*, the [Lenfest Institute for Journalism](#) is charged with testing business models to sustain local journalism more widely in a digital age. If local journalism thrives a decade from now, the innovations that sustain this institution so vital to communities and their governance will probably have origins in Philadelphia and the Lenfest Institute. (The institute is a grantee of the Wyncote Foundation, for which I work.)

Lenfest's death came at a time when the relationship of philanthropy to the public sector has claimed fresh currency. It is common to hear philanthropy criticized as guilt offerings by rich donors and foundations or, alternately, highly strategic attacks to shrink government or bring a socialist utopia. Rather than wading into that debate, I'd rather reflect on the opportunities for productive alliances between philanthropy and the public sector.

Lenfest's transformative act will not quiet the critics of big philanthropy, but in my mind it exemplifies the type of interventions into public affairs for which philanthropy is best suited. Just as Lenfest expected the *Inquirer* to sustain itself as a business, smart philanthropy neither tries to replace receding public dollars nor works to disable public-sector institutions. Rather, it aspires to provide opportunity to rethink gnarly problems and to give public institutions the financial breathing room and intellectual capital to test new approaches.

In the context of his critique of philanthropy published last year, *The Givers: Wealth, Power and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age*, David Callahan makes the central point about why philanthropy engages the government. I'm paraphrasing here, but Callahan, the editor of *Inside Philanthropy*, [argues](#) that if you put aside the ideologues, most of today's philanthropists seek not to replace public solutions with

private ones but to catalyze government to take new kinds of action -- to take risks and experiment with new ideas, to move quickly and pivot easily, and to pay attention to issues that have been neglected.

When I was in government, and later in philanthropy, I thought of the relationship as influencing how the "big money" -- public dollars -- was spent. "In other words," as Callahan observes, "the state hasn't been the enemy; the state has been the prize." This in no way suggests an abdication of responsibility by public officials; instead, confident leaders can partner with philanthropy to achieve better results. A few examples from my time in Pennsylvania state government:

- ▶ As the state designed its Medicaid program, foundations convened expert advisory panels to help us build practice standards for managed-care organizations and devise scorecards for recipients that could guide their selection of plans for their families.
- ▶ We relied heavily on foundation-supported research to structure dramatic changes in welfare programs and welcomed a Philadelphia foundation to underwrite independent evaluations of how well the programs were achieving desired results.
- ▶ We were also the target for philanthropy-fueled advocacy for higher standards in day care. The result was [the Keystone STARS system](#), which provides a ladder of quality improvement for day care and early childhood education.

When I moved to the philanthropy side, my public-sector experience informed work with grantees. In our work in Philadelphia, we emphasized the importance of unified voices rather than uncoordinated policy positions. In key issue areas we encouraged our grantees to find common ground, to press their positions on all candidates during mayoral elections. When we supported public-sector program innovations, in public education for example, we worked closely with grantees to see that successful pilots would be taken to scale -- not with additional grant funding but through changes in practice within the school district.



We were certainly not unique. Two examples from our region are the Neubauer Family Foundation and the Fund for New Jersey. Neubauer recognized that its resources had to be aimed at a target in schools where it could have impact; it started the Philadelphia Academy of School Leadership to strengthen the pipeline of well-prepared principals for public, charter and parochial schools. The focus by the Fund for New Jersey (on whose board I serve) on advancing desired policy goals led it to a convening and leadership role that has produced an impressive coalition to address the risks of undercounts in the 2020 census.

Not every foundation wants to engage with public systems, and some public officials view foundations merely as checkbooks to fill holes in their budgets. But for public leaders who want allies in change, there's a lot of room for strategic cooperation.

Feather O'Connor Hustoun, who has held positions at every level of government, is a senior adviser to the Wyncote Foundation on public media and journalism and a former president of the William Penn Foundation. She was a member of the Philadelphia School Reform Commission from December 2011 to October 2016.

Hustoun served as Pennsylvania's secretary of public welfare during Gov. Tom Ridge's administration, New Jersey state treasurer under Gov. Tom Kean, chief financial officer of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, and in a number of senior positions with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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When Cities Rely on Fines and Fees, Everybody Loses

They're a tempting alternative to raising taxes, but their long-term costs far outweigh the revenue they bring in.

ANNE KIM

Raising taxes is painful. That may be why, since 2010, 47 states and a number of cities have instead raised both civil and criminal fines and fees. These increases are often viewed as a conflict-free way to plug budget holes.

In the last decade, for example, New York City grew its revenues from fines by 35 percent, raking in \$993 million in fiscal 2016 alone. The monies came largely from parking and red light camera violations, as well as stricter enforcement of "quality of life" offenses such as littering and noise. In California, routine traffic tickets now carry a multiplicity of revenue-boosting "surcharges." As a result, the true price of a \$100 traffic ticket is more like \$490 -- and up to \$815 with late fees, according to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights of the San Francisco Bay Area.

This increasing reliance on fines and fees comes despite what we learned following the shooting in 2014 of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo. A federal investigation of the city's police department subsequently revealed that as much as a quarter of the city's budget was derived from fines and fees. Police officers, under pressure to "produce" revenue, extracted millions of dollars in penalties from lower-income and African-American residents. In 2017, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights issued a follow-up report finding that the "targeting" of low-income and minority communities for fines and fees is far from unique to Ferguson.

This potential for injustice is one reason why states and cities should be weaning themselves from fines and fees. Another is that these revenue boosters carry economic costs that far outweigh the short-term revenue gains.

Because the burden of these penalties falls disproportionately on people who can't afford to pay, jurisdictions collect far less than expected and waste resources chasing down payments that won't materialize. In California, increased fines and fees have resulted not in a treasury flush with cash but in \$12.3 billion in uncollected court debt as of 2016. A 2014 study of Alabama court costs also found abysmal collection rates -- under 10 percent on average -- despite countless hours spent by staff pursuing payment.

States can further see net losses if driver's licenses are suspended or residents are incarcerated for nonpayment. The report by the Commission on Civil Rights found that in some jurisdictions as many as one-fourth of local inmates were in jail for nonpayment of fines and fees. The fiscal

impacts of this policy are obvious. In addition to its direct expenses, incarceration -- even short stints in jail -- can lead to costly outcomes, including unemployment, dependence on public benefits and greater risk of crime.

Nearly as damaging -- and far more common -- are driver's license suspensions. *The Washington Post* reported that more than 7 million people nationwide may have had their licenses suspended because of traffic debts. These suspensions have economic consequences. "People can't drive and go to work, which means they can't pay the fines and fees or support their families," says Joanna Weiss, co-director of the Fines and Fees Justice Center.

A few jurisdictions are rethinking these revenue generators. In the lead is San Francisco, which established the Financial Justice Project dedicated to fines and fees reform. Promising efforts are also afoot in cities and states, including California, Illinois, New York City, Philadelphia and Washington state. Some jurisdictions are working to end license suspensions -- a trend that could accelerate after a federal judge recently ruled the practice unconstitutional in Tennessee. Other places are considering non-monetary penalties, such as community service or instituting so-called day fines or payment plans based on the ability to pay. In San Francisco, for instance, a newly instituted payment plan for low-income residents has already quadrupled the parking fines being paid.

The bottom line: Despite the short-term boosts civil and criminal fines and fees appear to bring, the long-term cost to cities, states and their residents is likely to be far greater.

Anne Kim is a senior fellow and director of domestic and social policy at the Progressive Policy Institute and a contributing editor at *Washington Monthly*. She writes about politics, poverty, social policy and economic opportunity. In addition to *Governing*, her work has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *Atlantic.com*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Democracy* and numerous other publications. A lawyer and a journalist, she's worked as a reporter and radio producer, a corporate attorney and as a senior staffer on Capitol Hill for a Tennessee congressman. She is currently writing a book on youth policy.

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A Reflection on the Election

ANGELA GRAVELLE

I sat restlessly at the kitchen table taking the last gulp from my third cup of coffee wondering if I had made the right decision: The decision to put myself into the race for Deputy Mayor [of Innisfil, Ontario] in the upcoming municipal election.

I had given this serious consideration. I had had some weighty conversations with close family members and a number of very supportive friends. But the deed was now done.

Earlier in the day I had made the trek to the Municipal Offices and met with the Municipal Clerk's staff to file my nomination papers, complete with the mandatory endorsements of support from fellow electors (mostly family, friends and neighbours). I did so with the full knowledge that this would entail a serious commitment, but it would be an honour to represent my community both locally and at the County for the next four years.

I wasn't concerned with surrounding myself with a solid support network or having a good understanding of what local government is about. I have spent almost a quarter century working inside local government for two progressive municipalities in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area]. And I had no doubts about my supportive network of friends and family who were solidly behind me and ready to help in ways that I could not imagine.

What gave me pause for concern was that I was new to this community, and I was going to face an uphill climb having virtually no name recognition in a sport that thrives on headlines and airtime. I knew that despite a full slate of candidates (5) for the office of Deputy Mayor, it would take a great deal of work to overcome the odds of beating out an individual who had previously held the position.

It was a long shot, but I did my homework. I reached out to current and former members of council, local community groups, a variety of businesses and citizens. I spent a significant amount of time getting to understand the nexus of a wide range of issues.

What I realized was that despite the range of issues I heard about, there was a constituency clamoring to be heard and understood. Time and time again I heard from those who felt they were forgotten, ignored, and disenfranchised by a level of government that seems to care but once every four years.

Spending time to do the reading and research made me a better citizen, a more informed candidate and one who was not running as a one trick pony buoyed by a single issue hoping to capitalize on riding a single wave to electoral success. If I was going to be serious about representing the community, I wanted to represent all of the people. I needed to understand the concerns that make this community what it is.

I had decided early on that if I put my name forward it would be for the purpose of being the very best representative, advocate, and policy maker that I could be. I wanted to help my community and share my skills as a facilitator, change agent and community builder. I was committed and inspired to use my knowledge and expertise in a way that would advance various initiatives for the betterment of my community. After all, I had volunteered in the past to support those who were disadvantaged, those who were in need of compassion, temporary housing, or social and community supports.

Having sized up the competition I felt relatively confident that I would be able to stand my ground in any debate or with any challenges presented by electors who might take issue with any of my platform. So, I put forward my platform. It wasn't about throwing mud at any of the candidates or the current council—it was about offering up solutions to problems that were identified by a wide constituency of the community. I felt that I had a solid campaign platform, a team of dedicated volunteers, and a desire to improve the community for the betterment of all.

I campaigned for the next three months: door-knocking daily, spending the evenings responding to campaign e-mails, returning phone calls, filling out special interest [organization's] "municipal candidate surveys", and attending what seemed to be an endless string of all-candidates community debates. I was delighted to see the campaign period draw to a close.

Looking back now, I realize that I met some pretty incredible and committed residents. Their passion for this community was never an issue, but their dogged determination at times seemed to get in the way of the true message they were trying to deliver.

I also met some folks who had some serious grievances that were not being addressed. I discovered that there is a concern that something would have to give before too long.

When the final tally was rendered (a day after the actual election day, due to a technical problem with the internet voting option) I was disappointed to find myself finishing 3rd out of the 5 seeking the office of Deputy Mayor.

Despite all of the door knocking, the mailouts, the debates and the social media efforts, it was not meant to be. Overcoming name recognition seemed to be insurmountable for my first attempt at elected office.

What was more disappointing was the poor turnout (32%) despite the much vaunted "internet and telephone" voting option that was supposed to help increase the voter engagement. There remains a big question as to why the majority of citizens can't be bothered to exercise their democratic rights and vote in local elections.

I also learned that although social media as a vehicle is a good way to reach a broad audience, there are far too many trolls who use the medium to engage and misinform people for a variety of reasons ('fake news'). As a means to an end it may not be all that appropriate when those participating aren't open to some honest dialogue and debate. Cheap shots and uninformed opinions too often dominated the discourse on several sites.

If I had the opportunity to change some aspects of municipal elections, I would offer the following thoughts:

- Hold municipal elections in the spring (April-May timeline), so the new council members can get their feet under them before they are faced with the challenge of putting together the next year's budget.
- Election technology should not be allowed to disenfranchise voters – when connectivity, and technology are an issue with large segments of the voting population, we should make accommodations that meet the needs of the residents.
- It is time to outlaw the blight and proliferation of election signage. Designate a limited number of locations where signs can be placed or outlaw them entirely. Sign pollution creates an eye-sore and is an environmental disaster.

- It may be time for federal, provincial and municipal elections to be coordinated by a single entity and a consistency in the eligibility rules for determining a permanent voters list.

I was asked right after the election if I would consider running again in four years? I'm not sure at this time. To be fair to myself and my family, I'll assess the situation at that time and decide if another run is in the cards.

I will however, continue to advocate for more women in politics and will continue to closely follow our local political scene. Where appropriate I will certainly voice my concerns and participate in helping to advance issues that are critically important for the future of the community.

Angela Gravelle

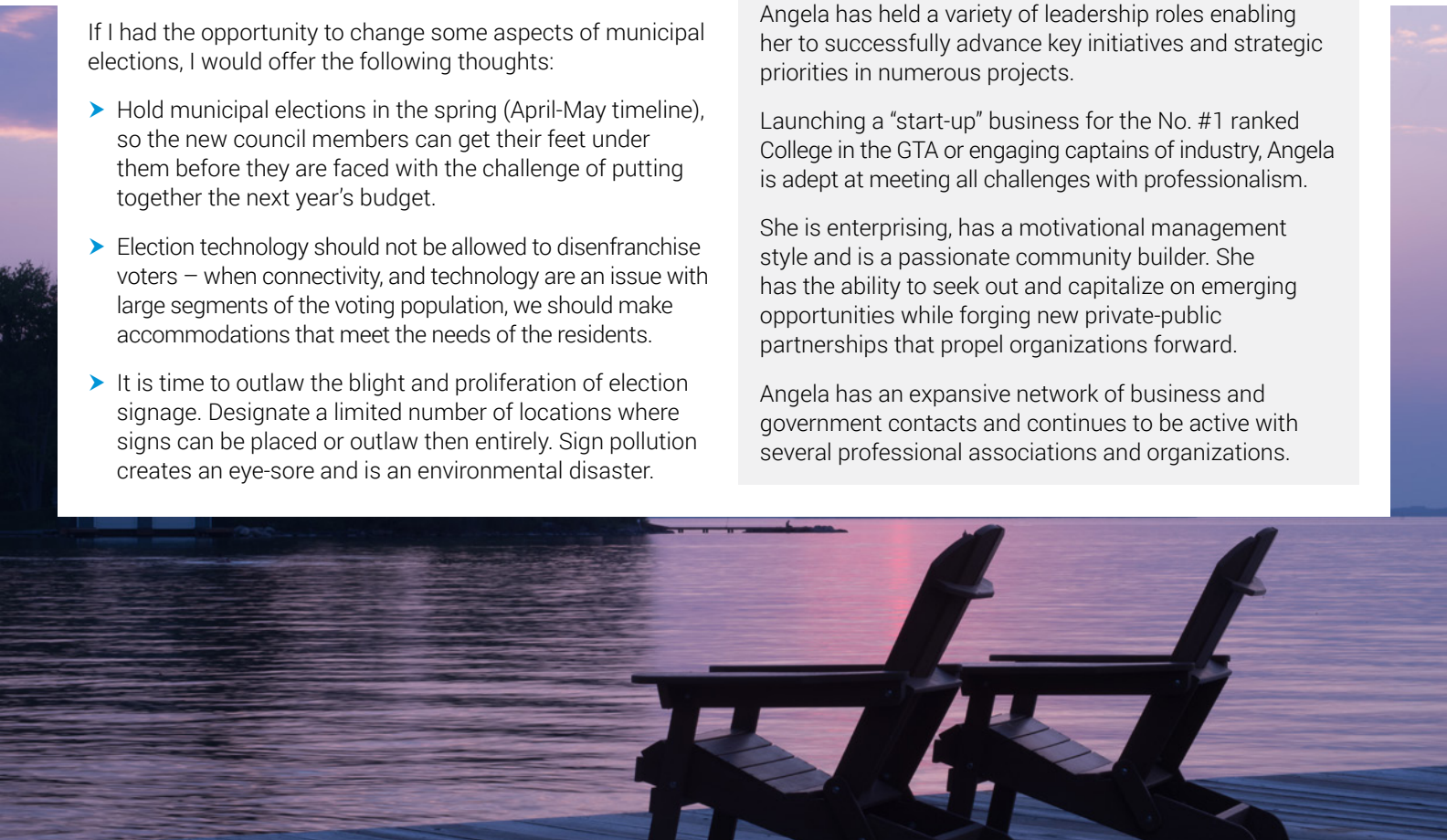
Angela has over 30 years of public and private-sector engagement, complimented by direct experience in community economic development and project management.

Angela has held a variety of leadership roles enabling her to successfully advance key initiatives and strategic priorities in numerous projects.

Launching a "start-up" business for the No. #1 ranked College in the GTA or engaging captains of industry, Angela is adept at meeting all challenges with professionalism.

She is enterprising, has a motivational management style and is a passionate community builder. She has the ability to seek out and capitalize on emerging opportunities while forging new private-public partnerships that propel organizations forward.

Angela has an expansive network of business and government contacts and continues to be active with several professional associations and organizations.





Underneath This 'Pop-Up Forest' Is an Abandoned Highway

Akron, Ohio, calls it the Innerbelt National Forest.

ALAN GREENBLATT

No matter how detailed the plans, there's no way to know for sure if a new idea will work until you give it a try. That's especially true with something genuinely novel -- like putting a forest on top of a downtown freeway.

More than a half-century ago, the city of Akron, Ohio, built a highway called the Innerbelt into its downtown. Like a lot of freeways created during that era, it destroyed some neighborhoods while cutting off others from the center of the city. In terms of handling traffic, it turned out to be unnecessary. Akron's population is down by a third from its 1960s peak. A road meant to carry 120,000 cars a day ended up being used, even on busy days, by maybe a fifth as many.

The city shut down the freeway a couple of years ago. That left the question of what to do with the land. A designer named Hunter Franks threw a big party, hosting a meal on the Innerbelt for several hundred people. Franks polled those who showed up, and they overwhelmingly said they favored turning the land into some kind of green space.

It wasn't that outlandish. Atlanta and New York have enjoyed huge success in turning old rail lines into elevated parks. Dallas and other cities have placed parks on top of working freeways. Still, Akron officials were not sold on the idea. They worried about the logistics of letting kids play in close contact with the active roads that were still connected. But Franks received a grant from the Knight Foundation that allowed him to proceed anyway.

At first, the city insisted that he plant trees in pots, so his "Innerbelt National Forest" would be easier to remove. In time, he was allowed to plant them in the ground, while also putting in a stage, a children's play area, a mulch trail and other amenities. The park, which opened in August, was an immediate hit. Although it was originally seen as temporary, talk soon started up about extending its life, or even making it permanent. "Some or all or most of it may end up staying," says Jason Segedy, Akron's planning director.

Residents, posting pictures of the park on Instagram, keep comparing it to an old Joni Mitchell song, noting that it's the reverse of her 1970 lyric about paving paradise to put up a parking lot. The fact that a disused freeway can become a pop-up forest makes it easy to envision turning practically any area into green space, Franks says.

The crucial thing was seeing it work in real life. It's one thing to try to imagine how a park might work when staring at plans, but it's an entirely different matter watching kids play there, or seeing people enjoying performances on pleasant summer evenings. Governments are good at holding meetings and soliciting proposals to imagine how something might work, but there's value in simply letting people use a space and allowing their behavior to inform a more permanent plan. "I like the idea of trying these kinds of things," Segedy says, "hitting on elements that people find compelling that we can recreate or use."

Alan Greenblatt covers politics as well as policy issues for *Governing*. He is the coauthor of a standard textbook on state and local governments. He previously worked as a reporter for NPR and CQ and has written about politics and culture for many other outlets, print and online.

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Rendering by Michelle Zucker, LOCI



Civic Comment

GORD HUME

Debris continues to fall from the decision by Ontario Premier Doug Ford to effectively halve Toronto City Council, and cancel the election of four Regional Chairs in the October municipal elections.

Toronto City Council took the Government to court, and won. The Judge was scathing in his comments about the province's passage of the "Better Local Government" Act. "The Province clearly crossed the line," Justice Belobaba said in his ruling. He called the Ontario legislation "unconstitutional".

Premier Ford then threatened use of the "Notwithstanding Clause" of the Canadian Constitution to override the court's decision. That caused a spasm from legal experts and political observers. The Prime Minister, wisely I think, decided to stay out of that fight. The Appeals Court finally settled the legal battle by overturning the lower court's ruling and approving the province's direction.

Ford's Trumpian actions were seen by some observers to be the precursor to his use of the infamous clause in other situations to advance his activist government's plans. In the case of the Toronto City Council situation, it seemed to be the equivalent of using a bazooka to light a cigar.

In my books, "Getting Cities Right" which I wrote a couple of years ago, I cautioned against the incursion of Trump-like actions and antics seeping across our border. That is exactly what is happening and it does not bode well for politics in this country.

From a larger perspective, the social, cultural and economic realities and importance of towns and cities is so vastly different today than 150 years ago that what might—might—have made some sense then makes no sense today.

This is why local governments have to fight for a greater role and responsibility in today's complex government diaspora. The handcuffs on Canadian municipalities cannot and should not be tolerated.

Yes, this is revolution. I freely admit that I have moved to that position from the friendlier 'evolution' that some preach. I continue to find that many locally elected officials truly do not comprehend the limitations and restrictions on their powers to effectively govern their local communities.

Often it is only when their provincial government unilaterally starts to download or sideload responsibilities, or abruptly and arbitrarily download financial obligations or change the traditional financial structure and grants, that the harsh reality comes home to them.

Over the past fifty years, I can think of only one Canadian Prime Minister who really 'got' the importance of cities and towns. That was Paul Martin, who as Finance Minister and then as Prime Minister brought in the Federal Gas Tax sharing that has poured billions into municipal coffers. He understood the need to change the tax system in Canada and he supported more consumption taxes for municipalities. Stephen Harper didn't care a damn about cities, and Justin Trudeau has been disappointing in specific actions to change the tax and/or governance structure and to really help municipalities. The very slow rollout of the much-vaunted infrastructure funding over the past three years has disappointed many municipalities.

I write this editorial to challenge you now because we're less than one year away from the federal election. What I'm hoping to do is to spark local debate and then action to make the plight of our cities and towns an important discussion point in that federal campaign.

If local communities demand to be a part of that campaign, we can create change. If towns and cities in every corner of the country get local candidates to come to city hall for a debate, or send them a questionnaire with tough questions about working with local governments and maybe even changing the system, then the revolution moves forward. If we can get increased sharing of consumption taxes, then local governments in Canada can finally start to join so many other western democracies that offer alternative (to the property tax) financial resources to help their communities.

Don't miss this opportunity. Start your thinking and planning now about how to participate in the 2019 federal election. Get your city councillors and mayors to ask residents to become advocates and to challenge federal candidates at the door about the federal government's interaction with and support for local governments.

We only get this chance once every four years. Don't miss it.