

SYMPOSIUM: 21ST CENTURY CHALLENGES IN URBAN MANAGEMENT

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Scholars in public administration are no strangers to the concept of governing within constraints, whether they be financial, political or social. Urban administrators have historically had to contend with a myriad of external and internal pressures. And while some seem to be more unique to particular times in history and others appear to resurface perennially.

The contributors to this symposium address a diverse set of contemporary challenges that face local government administrators. The essays present some ideas that are somewhat off the beaten path in terms of what we would think of as the “usual suspects” when thinking about constraint on local government administrators. In my view, it is this very novelty that makes these contributions so valuable.

Robert Dalziel, Chris Skelcher, Judith Petts and Sarah Damery present a fascinating view of the challenges involved in approving and shaping local urban design projects in the UK. Looking particularly at how risk matters. In an increasingly litigious world, risk matters a great deal and local managers must be cognizant of the potential risks that public projects entail. In their view, Dalziel and colleagues show that many public managers in the United Kingdom have taken a balanced approach to risk, attempting to weight the sometimes competing goals

of creating interesting public spaces with concerns about risk.

In the midst of the growing uncertainty about the health of the U.S. economy, recent events have certainly reemphasized once again the crucial role played by the housing and lending markets. In the midst of great economic uncertainty, is hard to overlook the central role played by massive defaults in the subprime credit markets. From the perspective of local managers, housing (and housing fraud) are also of central importance. Andrew Carswell and Douglas Bachtel examine the costs to local governments that arise from mortgage fraud. At first blush, mortgage fraud might only appear to harm financial institutions, but as Carswell and Bachtel show, there are numerous externalities from mortgage fraud that create significant indirect costs for local governments and loss of local tax base value.

In attempting to combat the forces of decline in urban communities, many local governments have turned to the bellwether Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for financial assistance. Historically, the CDBG program has been heralded by many local officials as a flexible tool that allows for them to meet the specific needs in their communities. Donna Handley studies the impact of recent federal requirements for accountability and performance on local administration of the CDBG program. Handley's work points to a disconnect in the intergovernmental grant system where federal mandates for

uniformity run counter to the flexibility that is the very hallmark of the CDBG program.

Finally, looking at the local politics of annexation, Jeremy Hall presents an interesting case study of how local governments are influenced by state rulemaking. Hall analyzes how changes in rules surrounding liquor licenses in Kentucky spurred a wave of unplanned annexations by local governments seeking to garner additional tax base. Hall's case study on state liquor laws provides a sobering reminder of the attendant externalities that sometimes result from seemingly unrelated domains of policymaking.

To conclude, local administrators face a variety of challenges, not only in routine day-to-day governing, but in the dizzying array of other forces that affect their local economies, and hence revenue sources and demands for local services and amenities. The pieces in this symposium amply demonstrate that as the external environment of governing grows in its complexity, local government professionals must be attuned to an ever increasing scope of relevant concerns more now so than ever before.

All papers submitted for the symposium underwent the traditional blind refereeing process. I would like to offer special thanks for the many colleagues that selflessly offered their expertise in reviewing the manuscripts for this symposium. Their insights and comments have undoubtedly strengthened all of the work contained in the symposium.