

Local Government Matters

Howard D. Tipton, retired city manager

When you look out your front door, office window or the window of your car, do you see a federal government service being provided? How about a state service? You might; there could be a federal or state road within sight, or perhaps a national forest or state park. It is more likely, however, that your view from these same vantage points will include a county, school district and municipal service. From the tap water you drink, to garbage collection and recycling; from the neighborhood park to the fire station to the county courthouse; from traffic signs and sidewalks to a youth baseball league; from elementary schools to high schools and after-school programs, it is your local governments who deliver these services and many more. These levels of government are closer to Florida's citizens and visitors than any other level. And, local decisions are citizen-led: you and your neighbors take the lead in serving on the councils, commissions, boards and committees that make decisions impacting your daily quality of life. This kind of public service, one of the truest forms of representative democracy, takes planning and commitment to meet the 24/7 demands placed upon it. Professional staff also helps local governments run effectively – and these individuals aren't always visible when the services are delivered. You worship with them, attend your children's activities with them and see them at community events – they are not strangers, but neighbors. In a tough economy, with challenges to every sector of our state, there are similarities in the difficulties and opportunities faced by public and private sector professionals – and one of those challenges is helping Floridians understand that local government matters. From time to time it is appropriate to acknowledge the contributions of city, county, school district and special district governments and to remind the citizens and visitors of Florida of these dedicated professionals. As we leave the summer season and look toward the new fiscal year of our local governments, it is a very good time to express our thanks and to get more involved at the local level.

Tipton served as city manager of Daytona Beach from 1978 to 1994; as chief administrative officer of Orlando from 1994 to 2000; and has served as interim manager for Flagler Beach and Windermere.