

April Mayor's Report

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I have previously discussed my affiliation with the Metro Mayors, Southwest Illinois Conference of Mayors, and the Illinois Municipal League. Much can be learned by participating with these organizations. Often, we find ourselves trying to solve problems on our own, forgetting there are 83,000 other local governments facing similar issues. While each community is unique, it is very likely that another community has faced and addressed the same challenges, often in innovative ways.

The reduced revenues and increased demand for services caused by financially struggling citizens have created many problems and stretched municipal revenues to the limit. While the federal stimulus dollars helped fund some capital projects, 67% of all cities stated they had directly benefited from stimulus dollar, it was not structured to solve the daily operational revenue shortfalls we face.

I recently took part in a nationwide survey of 614 cities of all sizes. The results of this survey, while not exactly rosy, showed many comparisons. In 2010, 87% of cities surveyed reported flat or declining revenues, meaning communities were doing more with less. To accommodate revenue shortfalls, 61% of cities instituted hiring freezes, layoffs, or both. In addition, 33% reduced employee benefits, 29% cut services, and 54% delayed or canceled capital projects, like street repairs. Just to show that we are not alone, approximately 60% of the cities surveyed indicated moderate to severe problems dealing with poverty, foreclosures, and vacant buildings.

A clear trend identified the larger the city the more intensely population grew. No city that took part in this survey with a population of over 200,000 reported a decline in population. The notion is, in hard economic times, people will move closer to communities where they perceive job

opportunities. However, these urban centers experienced the largest decline in their budgets. The larger the city, the more pronounced the above mentioned challenges of poverty, foreclosures, and abandoned property.

I have always had an open door policy and encouraged citizen input. A mayor must understand the average citizen's perceptions and issues. Prioritizing your constituents' wants and active communication prevents a mayor from falling into the familiar trap of over-reacting to a vocal minority instead of serving the silent majority. While governing is challenging and contentious at times, outlining priorities simply gets more accomplished. A mayor must have a long-range plan and have a history of where other administrations have already been to expedite policy.

I, as your mayor, have never lost my sense of optimism and enthusiasm for our community. We have gotten through two of the most difficult years in Alton's financial history. This happened, not by accident, but by pain in job reductions, spending restraints, re-evaluating policies, citizen understanding and cooperation, and a long-range vision and plan for our future. These are some of the most difficult times many of us will ever face, however with clear and defined objectives outlined we will move our community forward and to the next level in a more efficient manner.

The National Survey of Cities is an annual poll of municipalities across America conducted by Governing Dynamic, LLC. All statistics and information provided by Governing Dynamic LLC.

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