



Leon County

Board of County Commissioners

301 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida
(850) 606-5300 www.leoncountyfl.gov

MY VIEW

Leon County: A New Model for the New Normal

Vincent S. Long, Leon County Administrator

On July 1, I took on my new role as County Administrator. Before the first 60 days could fly by, I stood before the Board of County Commissioners for nearly two hours and described what I refer to as a new model for the new normal. As I conveyed to the Commission, I believe this model is essential in order to place the Board in the best position to realize their vision for our community and to have a County government capable of fulfilling our responsibilities to our citizens amidst the unprecedented challenges we face today and will continue to confront in the foreseeable future. This model is not an initiative or a management exercise; it requires a shift in organizational culture - a culture which is people-focused, performance-driven in everything we do at the County. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little more about what you can expect of your County government moving forward.

The challenges before us require real courage not only to tackle them head-on, but to look in the mirror and acknowledge where we can do better. We have faced a global economic calamity marked by the first worldwide contraction in GDP since the Great Depression, persistent unemployment, record foreclosures, personal bankruptcies, and a continuous decline in home values. Here in Florida, our reliance on a construction economy has left us with almost one million of the nine million unemployed people in the country and one in four of the foreclosures in the U.S. This is a time when local government, as an institution, is an easy political target, or worse, a convenient diversion to fixing chronic problems that plague our state. This political climate, combined with the real economic struggles that people are facing, has led to a new level of skepticism in government, and a time when a growing number of citizens see themselves as individual disenfranchised taxpayers, rather than stakeholders in our collective success as a community. The new normal for local governments is a time of continuous decreases in revenues, corresponding increases in demands for services, and coexisting demand for no new taxes.

But we will not be successful in this new normal by being distracted by the politics of the day. Leon County government will use these challenges as an opportunity to convey greater relevance, prove our value and strengthen our relationships. And our organizational culture will ensure that Leon County government is in a constant state of becoming the highest performing organization we can be, and will do so in a way that always upholds our values and instills not only the public's trust, but conveys a true sense of relevance for the role of County government.

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Under the leadership of the Board, and as carried out by the dedicated employees of Leon County, we will become the model for effectiveness as a 21st-century county government by:

- Setting the benchmark for performance;
- Demonstrating to our citizens that we are on their side, letting them know that they are the reason we exist, and what they are getting for their tax dollars;
- Producing bigger and better ideas to address the real issues facing our community;
- Actively promoting transparency, accessibility, and openness in everything we do;
- Engaging citizens in important decisions facing the community;
- Tirelessly enhancing our community's livability, sustainability, and economic competitiveness; and
- Providing employees a structure which reinforces this as our organizational culture and empowering them to help people.

I have reorganized the County government in a manner which reinforces all this and incorporates the themes of partnership and stewardship in departmental names and missions. In the coming weeks, I look forward to unveiling new initiatives which further demonstrate this commitment, including the County's redesigned website which features a "Citizens Connect" button for citizens to access online services, report or track a problem, make an inquiry online, or simply talk to a live person, at the click of a mouse. The site will also feature "Your Checkbook" a searchable engine of actual County expenditures, including checks, purchase orders, and vendor invoices. In January, we will launch the Citizen Engagement Series which will offer citizens interactive courses on county government operations and engage participants in important decisions facing the community.

In every way that Leon County government touches the lives of our citizens and shapes our community, we will do so in a way that demonstrates our belief that our community and our citizens are worth caring about, worth investing in, and are worth our best efforts, as responsible stewards and responsive providers of high-quality services. People focused. Performance driven. With this model in place, we are poised as a County government to face the new normal on behalf of, and alongside, our community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vince Long became the Leon County Administrator on July 1, and he has worked for the County since 1995. He can be reached at (850) 606-5300 or LongV@LeonCountyFL.gov.

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