



Leon County

Board of County Commissioners

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

MY VIEW

Leon County Seeking Citizens for Meaningful Relationship

Vincent S. Long, Leon County Administrator

The foundation for everything we do in Leon County government is the long held belief that when we include citizens, we make better decisions and have a greater positive impact on our community. I can tell you after almost seventeen years with the County organization, this belief is one which has been reflected in the way County Commissions have served and how the County has conducted the public's business for many years - and since before my time. But in a time of unprecedented economic challenges and unfortunate political pressures, as local government continues to struggle to comprehend how to fulfill our obligations to our community, we are just beginning to realize the enormous potential we have to more effectively engage our citizens in ways that are meaningful, which reinforce the powerful connection that people have to this place they live, and which tap into the great capacity of our human capital.

The County Commission has ensured that this new standard of citizen engagement is not a fad, or an exercise, or an initiative – that may come or go until we move on to the next thing. It marks the next step in our progress as a viable 21st century local government. It builds on that foundation of including citizens in their county government, yes. But not because you have a “right” to that - of course you do. And not because we are an altruistic government - I believe we are. But rather, because we recognize that we can neither afford to throw money we do not have at our problems, nor have the talents our people overlooked or marginalized as we try to move forward as a community even in tough times.

Meaningful citizen engagement is an important part of our culture - or just how we do things around here. One where no detail is too small, no process too important and no problem too complex not to ask ourselves instinctively: how can we gain from the perspectives outside of the Courthouse? I would like to share with you just a few ways, big and small, that the County is increasing the frequency, the diversity and the intensity of our efforts to better engage you.

Today, Leon County will host the second in our recently launched Citizen Engagement Series. This month's session is entitled: “Balancing Budgets and Exercising Fiscal Stewardship: Making Hard Choices in Challenging Times.” These three hour bi-monthly sessions provide the opportunity for citizens and county officials to regularly interact with each other on all matters of county government operations. The series provide citizens with in depth knowledge of county government and the ability for the County to get direct perspectives and insight from citizens. These are highly immersive sessions; not just citizens listening to PowerPoint presentations, but rather a hands-on experience to connect them with their county government. Please visit the County's website at www.LeonCountyFL.gov for more information on today's session and future sessions in the series.

(More)

Speaking of the Leon County website, the County recently launched a powerful and highly interactive redesigned site as another means to connect with citizens and provide you the information you need at your finger tips. The site features our "Citizens Connect" button which provides the information you are looking for fast. It's an "easy button" for county government. With one click you can access online services, report or track a service call, make an inquiry, or simply talk to a live person. We also developed a "Your Checkbook" feature - an online searchable database for actual county expenditures. Across the top of the page are drop down menus categorized in what we call our "Core Four" areas of emphasis, which include: Demonstrating Performance and Results, Promoting Transparency, Accountability and Accessibility, Engaging Citizens and Partnering with our Community, and Ensuring Liveability and Sustainability. Each of the core four menus contain much useful information and are constantly updated. The idea behind the website is simple, when you remove the clutter, you begin to remove the frustration, and when you remove the mystery, you promote trust. Just last week, our website received an "A" by Sunshine Review and was recognized with a Sunny Award as one of the most transparent websites in the country (an award you cannot apply for).

Another effort I am proud to announce is that in every county division we are conducting annual meetings where we invite our customers in and ask them questions around how specifically we can serve and engage them better. Our LEADS review stands for: Listening for changing needs, engaging citizens and employees, aligning processes, delivering results and striving for continuous improvement. This goes beyond simply placing suggestion boxes in County facilities or on the County website. During these LEAD reviews, customers are in the room with key staff discussing what works, what doesn't and where we can improve. Every division must complete a report with recommendations for improvements derived from the process which is delivered to me. Over 140 citizens engaged in this process in only the last couple of months.

As I stated earlier, Leon County is engaging citizens in ways big and small and too many to exhaust here. Recently the County Commission established a citizen committee to make recommendations on a possible extension of the one-cent infrastructure surtax ("Blue Print 2000"), which has the potential reshape our community. In another ongoing County Commission deliberation involving the evaluation of the economic impact of a competitive sports complex, a member of the Knight Creative Class Initiative was invited and served on the committee with county staff to select the consultant. This of course is in addition to over 250 citizens who currently serve on advisory committees and focus groups for the County.

I submit to you that your county government and your community needs your active engagement if we are to be a community which realizes progress, stays a great place to live and attracts and retains talent even in the toughest of times. When you engage with Leon County government you will not be treated as a customer, but as a co-creator of 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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