

Eric R. Johnson

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Summary

Thirty years' senior management experience in local government – primarily in Florida county government – and experience managing one of the fastest growing counties in the United States. Represented the Florida Association of Counties on State of Florida task forces while also serving on national task forces on behalf of local governments. Initiated economic development tools including a “fast pass” process to expedite priority projects. Led major cross-jurisdictional projects, and negotiated complex contracts. Led dozens of community meetings as input to key policymaking decisions. Cut millage rates numerous times to aid taxpayers.

City Manager, City of Norcross, GA 10/20 – present

Developed strategies for use of federal funding – Cares Act, ARPA, and FEMA reimbursements. Initiated citywide infrastructure upgrades in stormwater and transportation to address years of neglected major maintenance with a plan to upgrade or replace all stormwater pipes within three years and resurface all roads within 10 years.

Implemented the City's first comprehensive salary study, supported two affordable residential developments that received 9% federal tax credits through statewide competition, and retained designation as a Platinum level sustainable community through the Atlanta Regional Commission. Successfully replaced several key senior positions in a period of the “Great Resignation.” Initiated process improvements, addressed the need for front-facing bilingual positions, began a conversion to hybrid and electric vehicles, and implemented a millage reduction. Managed an electric utility, stormwater utility, and solid waste utility.

County Manager, Forsyth County (Cumming, GA) 9/2017 – 9/2020 (3-year contract position)

Led the fastest growing county in Georgia (and the 9th fastest growing county in the United States since 2010) with a population of 254,000. Initiated measures to protect employees and customers in the face of the Covid pandemic. Successfully passed a countywide referendum on a local option sales tax after holding a series of community meetings and using the County's web site to take input from the community.

Restructured the process to accelerate delivery of transportation projects after consultation with utilities, architects, construction companies, and the Georgia DOT. Upgraded infrastructure standards to reflect rising community expectations, and introduced incentives to completing projects. These required successful negotiations with the largest roadbuilder in the state, and one of the largest engineering firms in the world. Worked directly with the Commissioner who heads the Georgia Department of Transportation on joint funding of road and interchange projects. Worked directly with the head of the Georgia DOT (equivalent to the Florida Secretary of FDOT) on funding of projects within the County.

Expedited economic development projects – and others – by a creating “fast-pass” position within Planning, and another reporting directly to the County Manager with authority to cross department lines and resolve process issues. Proof of concept was expediting a 135-acre mixed-use development already in development – Halcyon Forsyth – involving retail, apartments, hotels, office space, townhomes, and single-family houses.

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Moody's and S&P reconfirmed the County's stable Aaa/AAA bond ratings in 2019 and the County secured its first rating from Fitch Ratings – a stable AAA on water and sewer bonds – to join the elite group of AAA/AAA/Aaa governments. Issued the County's first bonds through a competitive process, resulting in a true interest cost (TIC) of 0.95% for \$100 million in sales tax-backed bonds. Issued \$170 million in utility bonds for water and wastewater expansion and to refinance existing utility debt.

Initiated incentives for cross-training and certifications in several departments to broaden employees' skills and productivity – a concept borrowed from Manatee County years ago – and to improve customer service. Implemented a new pay structure based on a comprehensive study of area governments -- addressing "pay compression" issues that had remained after earlier studies and set ranges at the 65th percentile to become a preferred employer.

Updated the County fleet and facilities, and implemented technology projects – all targeted to improve employee productivity. Funding for these areas had languished since the recession.

Served on the Board of Directors of the Forsyth County Chamber, and on the Executive Committee of the Forsyth County United Way.

Assistant County Administrator, Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 2015 – 2017

Hillsborough County served a population of 1.4 million, of whom 900,000 lived in unincorporated areas for which the County served as the municipal service provider, with an all-funds budget of \$3 billion.

As the lead on a cross-organizational transportation initiative, led 64 community meetings throughout three cities and the unincorporated areas while managing monthly briefings with each county commissioner and each mayor, and coordinating with two city managers and a chief of staff.

Transformed the Human Resources Department structure to better achieve success in attracting and retaining County employees in a more competitive market. Headed off accelerating costs in the \$80 million self-funded employee health care program while shoring up reserves that had been drained: instituted plan changes, increased contributions, and drove down costs through wellness initiatives that are broad in terms of participation but focused on where the organization can best manage costs while improving employees' and their dependents' quality of life.

Initiated formal grants management policies and procedures across all County departments consistent with new federal requirements, and covering more than \$80 million in state and federal grants. Successfully competed for new grants including a Homeland Security grant for a fire boat used primarily to serve boaters on Tampa Bay.

Tasked as Interim Director of Affordable Housing Services for seven months while maintaining all other responsibilities as Assistant County Administrator, managing a \$30 million program. Gained additional community development expertise in housing issues, particularly with non-profit developers, and in the use of federal tax credits to incentivize investments without local funds.

Director of Strategic Planning and ERP Implementation, Hillsborough County 2011 – 2015

Tasked with two substantial cross-organizational/cross-jurisdictional initiatives – development of a new County strategic plan in the aftermath of the Great Recession, and a joint technology project with the City of Tampa that reflected the largest IT project in the County's history – a \$34 million 5-year joint investment that, based on vendor pricing, saved Hillsborough County \$4.4 million, and the City of Tampa \$2.2 million.

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Strategic planning involved close work with county commissioners, city mayors, the business community, local government agencies including the Aviation Authority and the Tampa Port Authority, and other regional leaders and citizens. It incorporated the County's first use of crowdsourcing technology for public engagement. The resulting plan reflected a heavy emphasis on economic development, recognizing that a strong economy not only benefits business, but also government and non-profits. A key takeaway was how to assist development projects by working with developers with a sense of urgency, which I implemented in Forsyth County.

Initiated a grants management office and assumed oversight for a criminal justice unit. A greater focus on recovering overhead costs from grants yielded an added \$1.4 million in recurring annual revenue to the General Fund. New federal funding was obtained to support criminal justice diversion programs to reduce the Sheriff's inmate population and reduce recidivism. The process for applying for regional water management grants in support of stormwater management was centralized to ensure prioritization of projects, and to increase the potential for successful award of funding.

Management Services Administrator, Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 2008 – 2011

Served in the capacity of assistant county administrator directing 300 employees in seven departments: Administrative Services, Management and Budget, Human Resources, Procurement Services, Information and Technology Services, Fleet Management, and Consumer Protection. Simultaneously served as Director of Management and Budget daily due to budget cuts.

Implemented substantial spending cuts due to Florida tax reform measures (\$43 million) and, one year later, due to the Great Recession (\$95 million). The variety and sophistication of cuts reflected use of a zero-base budget process coupled with a comprehensive set of financial policies. Minimized layoffs through aggressive placement of employees while cutting 1,150 positions – a 17.4% reduction in positions. Built reserves while creating "war chests" to ensure funding availability for two Board-identified priority areas: economic development (\$18.5 million) and affordable housing (\$6 million). Non-recurring savings were used to defease debt -- freeing up a portion of the County's recurring non-ad valorem revenues to sustain recurring operations in the aftermath of the recession.

Procurement received the highest national recognition from NIGP – the Pareto Award for Excellence. Fleet received national recognition from *Fleet Management Magazine* for the nation's best government fleet – twice. Received the County's first AAA bond rating from S&P, subsequently followed by similar ratings from Fitch Ratings, and Moody's. Appointed by the Florida Association of Counties to represent counties in an oversight committee formed by the State of Florida to address investment losses of state and local funds by the State Board of Administration because of investment in mortgage-backed securities.

Initiated a joint ERP project with the Clerk of Court and the City of Tampa to manage costs to replace outdated equipment and software.

Director of Management and Budget, Hillsborough County (Tampa, FL) 1993 – 2008

Developed budgets in excess of \$3 billion using a zero-base budget process to allow priority budgeting. Implemented the first biennial budget in Florida and assisted other Florida governments switch to a biennial cycle. Facilitated a series of millage rate reductions that improved the county's bond ratings while mitigating a portion of the impact of increasing property values on taxes. While Save Our Homes helps homestead property owners, only millage reductions assist other taxpayers.

Built reserves and maintained multi-year financial forecasts – all oriented towards the County subsequently obtaining AAA/AAA/Aaa bond ratings. Received the highest recognition in government finance, the GFOA *Award for Excellence*, for creating the *Taxpayer's Guide to the Hillsborough County Budget* – which became a model for jurisdictions communicating with residents and businesses.

Implemented cost reduction strategies, performance management, and a fleet replacement funding strategy that improved the quality of the County's fleet, reduced downtime and maintenance costs, and shrank the fleet size. Instituted random audits of performance metrics to ensure proper documentation of performance.

Served as Chair of the Governmental Budgeting and Management Committee for the Government Finance Officers Association of the U.S. and Canada (GFOA). Served on the Executive Board of GFOA. Served as a reviewer for GFOA's Distinguished Budget Presentation Award Program and taught national GFOA seminars on budgeting, performance measurement, service level evaluation, and revenue analysis. Appointed to state committees to oversee development of fiscal impact models for use by local governments, and to create a comprehensive communications services tax for local governments. Represented GFOA on the State and Local Advisory Committee to the Streamlined Sales Tax Project (collection of state and local sales taxes on remote Internet sales).

Education at Florida Universities

- **BA in Economics**, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
- **MPA**, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL (Served as adjunct faculty member after graduation, teaching two courses in the MPA program at USF.)

Recognition

- Picot B. Floyd Public Service Award, ASPA Suncoast Chapter
- Achievement Award, National Association of Counties
- GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, with Special Performance Measures Recognition.
- Award for Excellence, GFOA
- Diversified Workforce Achievement Award, Hillsborough County
- Breakthrough Award, United Way of Forsyth County