



## Meetings with Managers: High Point

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Local Government](#), [Meetings with Managers](#)

Date : August 20, 2009



On Thursday morning I visited with [Strib Boynton](#), the City Manager for High Point. I am fond of High Point for at least two reasons: (1) my wife's first job out of law school was as police attorney for the city (she carried a walkie talkie most of the time, which I thought was pretty cool), and (2) they have a state-of-the-art [Krispy Kreme doughnut store](#) on Main Street. These visits are beginning to follow a comfortable pattern—we talk about how the local government is managing during the bad economy and then I ask about pressing problems where we might be helpful. Of course there is a lot of unstructured conversation, which is how I learned that Strib has a farm in his hometown, Springfield, Illinois, that he actively manages by returning there four to six times a year. I also ask everyone about *Popular Government* because it is a narrowly focused question and I assume that they have an opinion—and they do.

High Point has managed to weather the economic storm so far without laying off any employees. They eliminated about 30 vacant positions and they are relying on a \$35 million fund balance to help get them through the hard times. They also continue to have a hiring freeze that is in effect at least until July 2010, except for police, fire, and other exceptions agreed to by the manager. My impression in talking with these managers is that the work does not necessarily go away when a position is eliminated, and in many cases other employees are taking on the extra work. High Point has not imposed a freeze on travel or training, but they are cutting back significantly on out-of-state travel.

I asked Strib about pressing issues, and without any prompting (I promise) he talked passionately for more than 30 minutes about the need to prepare cities and counties for collective bargaining. I won't attempt to cover all of his points here, but he believes that a federal law mandating collective bargaining with police and fire employees will be passed by Congress and signed by President



Obama before the end of 2009. He spent nine years negotiating labor contracts as a city manager in Iowa, Michigan, and Illinois. His concern is that elected officials and managers in North Carolina have no clue about how this will change their world—he assumes that the unionization of other public jobs will follow, and he believes that “this is all we will be dealing with for the next five years.” He argues that none of the other issues facing local governments will present challenges nearly as great as collective bargaining. Diane Juffras and Bob Joyce already are scheduled to meet with me to talk about their ideas for how we might be help on this issue, which partly was prompted because Russell Allen identified the same issue when we met in Raleigh.

When I asked about *Popular Government*, Strib said that he doesn't read it. He believes that we should produce something that is “shorter and much more to the point,” and that it also could be done electronically. It is possible that some long-time managers would object to discontinuing the magazine, according to him, but they just need to understand “that the times are changing.” Strib believes that we could produce something much more useful. When I thanked him (at least twice) for paying their membership dues, he said that it is a bargain and “the dues are too cheap.”

I'll post something later about my lunch meeting with Bob Morgan, the Interim City Manager for Greensboro. I'm off tomorrow morning to meet with the managers from Wilmington and New Hanover County, and on Monday I meet with managers in Buncombe County, Asheville, and Catawba County. These are all day trips, and so it may take a few days before I post about each meeting. Please feel free to share your comments or reactions.