



## Town Manager Visits: Zebulon and Wake Forest

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I visited separately with two town managers on Friday—Joe Moore with the Town of Zebulon and Kip Padgett with the Town of Wake Forest. Their comments were interesting in light of our ongoing conversations about the School's strategic priorities. As with all of my local government manager visits, I thanked them for paying their membership dues and I asked about their challenges. And then I listened.

Joe Moore is a graduate of our MPA Program, and before going to Zebulon he had been Town Manager for Brevard in the mountains. Zebulon is 16 miles east of Raleigh and in some ways is the last undiscovered town in Wake County, and managing its rapid growth and the accompanying changes is a major challenge.



Joe Moore

Joe observed that there was a time when the School's role was focused mostly on law—he described it as teaching local officials about “the rules of the road.” He recognizes the importance of law, but he also thinks we need to “pivot” more to other areas of expertise as local governments become more professional—and as their needs change.

In particular, Joe focused on the need to give elected officials access to more data that will help them understand the changes in their community and across the state. He referenced a presentation on changing demographics from [Carolina Demography](#) at the North Carolina League of Municipalities conference that resonated with Zebulon's elected officials. Joe also expressed an interest in other kinds of data that will help inform local decision making, and he mentioned the Environmental Finance Center and the Development Finance Initiative as positive examples that give local governments important data for specialized kinds of decisions. He sees the demand for data increasing. Joe also talked about the need for more leadership development opportunities for elected officials.

Kip Padgett is new to North Carolina and became Town Manager for Wake Forest in July 2015. He previously served as Town Manager for Gainesville, Georgia, and he also has held various planning positions there and in other Georgia communities. Kip currently is participating in the Municipal Administration course and he had high praise for the curriculum, Greg Allison, and the faculty members teaching in the program. He described the course as critically important for him in getting up-to-speed quickly about local government in North Carolina, which was especially important coming from a home-rule state like Georgia.



Kip Padgett

Wake Forest already has experienced the growth and development that is coming quickly to Zebulon. It is a bedroom community for Raleigh and there has been an explosion of new housing developments. The town's population grew since 2010 from 22,000 to nearly 40,000. They have infrastructure issues among their challenges, but Kip talked mostly about needing to "focus inside the walls." Over the last ten years the town staff also has grown—from 100 to 240 employees—and he recognizes the need to develop the management and leadership skills of his employees. Kip talked about identifying key emerging leaders for [the LGFCU Fellows Program](#), and he plans to attend [the Public Executive Leadership Academy \(PELA\)](#). I thought it was great that he already had identified these programs. As a new manager to North Carolina, it was great to hear Kip talk about how he feels supported by the School.

If you haven't been to Wake Forest lately, and I had not been, it has an absolutely charming downtown. The anchor tenant is the White Street Brewing Company, which is an award-winning craft brewery. Its Kolsch-style ale won a gold medal at the 2014 World Beer Cup, which is a pretty big deal. It also says something about the changes in Wake Forest that the brewery manages to exist in harmony with the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary a few blocks away.



Public law is a critically important foundation for all of the School's work, and my experience is that local government managers appreciate it. Like Joe Moore and Kip Padgett, however, managers, elected officials, and others increasingly want more support from the School in different areas. Given that we are considering the creation of a data center as one of our strategic priorities, it was fascinating to hear Joe talk about his growing need for data to understand issues and support decisions. It also was interesting to hear Kip and Joe talk about the importance of the School's work on leadership development. These are only two voices, but their comments generally reinforce what I have heard from other managers in recent years.