

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES  
EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

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*Section 16*

*Leonard “Len” B. Sossamon*

*Gainesville City Manager  
Candidate Report*

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*Cover Letter and Resume*

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Leonard B. Sossamon  
5601 Springs Avenue, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29577  
Telephone (704) 796-8889 Email: jordnbrn@aol.com

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July 17, 2019

Colin Baenziger & Associates  
2055 South Atlantic Avenue, Suite 504  
Daytona Beach Shores, Florida 32118

Dear Mr. Baenziger:

Please accept this letter and following resume for your consideration in the recruitment of the next City Manager for Gainesville, Florida. I believe my achievements, education and diverse work experience has prepared me well for this position.

Gainesville's primary focus is oriented to the future and being strategic with constant work to make the city a better place for all to live, work, play and raise a family. Two of my strong points are planning and thinking strategically for the future. My resume presents successes in this area where I developed a growth plan to aid the City of Concord, North Carolina in growing its presence in the Charlotte SMSA and yet improving its quality of life and protecting its heritage. The strategic plan I developed for Hernando County Florida was geared toward keeping the environment sustainable, improving the quality of life for all citizens and building a stronger local economy.

I am a results-oriented manager who knows that a "win-win orientation" is the best way to build a dynamic organization to lead any city progressively into the future. My style of leadership by example inspires both employees and the community since I demonstrate a passion for public service and solid leadership. An example of this is when I was the main author of Hernando County's first strategic plan, which the County Commission, staff, and public embraced with enthusiasm. Another example is when I was directed by Concord City Council to build the Concord Regional Airport and I was able to get global buy-in from residents and staff.

My resume will demonstrate that I am a visionary for public service and the work we perform. An in-depth interview will be deeply appreciated so I may fully present my communication skills, attention to customer service and leadership prowess. Thank you for taking the time to review my application package.

Sincerely,

  
Leonard B. Sossamon

Enclosure

**LEONARD B. SOSSAMON**

5601 Springs Avenue, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577

Home (704) 786-4271

Email: jordnbrn@aol.com

Cell (704) 796-8889

**SUMMARY**

More than thirty years of local government experience with expertise in the following areas:

- Operations and Project Management
- Strategic Planning and Operations Analysis
- Organizational Change and Development
- Financial Operations and Budget
- Economic Development
- Community Development
- Media Relations
- Customer Service

An innovative leader with demonstrated organizational, analytical and communication skills. Experienced in managing change and specializing in turnarounds. Achievement oriented with foresight. A dedicated team player who is able to work independently within the organizational framework.

**RELEVANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE**

**County Administrator, Hernando County, Florida**

**2012 – 2019**

Hernando County is a county with a population of 188,500 covering 589 square miles. It is located approximately 40 miles north of Tampa on Florida's Gulf of Mexico coast. The county seat is Brooksville with a population of 7,500, so the county is responsible for serving the remaining population with all usual county and municipal services. This includes water and sewer services to over 60,000 households. It also includes providing contractual solid waste collection services to county residents and operation of the county's landfill and recycling efforts. Also, the County Administrator is responsible for operating a full service fire and rescue department of about 300 full time firefighters, first responders, and EMTs.

From 2015 through 2018, the Economic Development team managed over 500,000 square feet of new manufacturing space in Hernando County. This includes new companies recruited to come build in Hernando County, as well as expansions. These efforts produced over 500 new jobs and the retention of over 350 jobs. Major expansion projects included Barrette Outdoor Living/AlumiGuard, Flagstone Pavers, Airofog USA LLC, Surge Suppression LLC, Composite Motors, Premier Pharmacy Labs, and Monster Transmissions. New businesses recruited include e-TeleQuote Insurance, Inc., Successful Acquisitions and Baker Parts. Also, ICTC and NCIS elevators expanded creating new jobs. In 2018, we completed negotiations for a new 200,000 square foot cold storage facility for a gain of 60 new jobs. It is known as Frigitek Cold Storage and will be located at the county owned and operated Brooksville Tampa Bay Regional Airport and Technology Center. Throughout this time period, we managed 18 to 25 active projects per year. Hernando County's incentive package for new and expanding businesses totaled \$1.5 million and produced a new tax base of over \$50 million. These funds are paid to the company over 5 – 7 calendar years.

Within less than six months on the job, Hernando County was struck by several tropical storms and hurricanes. I quickly discovered the county had no bonafide Stormwater Management Plan. In a series of meetings with the County Engineer and the Public Works Director, we compiled the appropriate best available data from past events and secured BOCC approval for development of a stormwater plan based on Best Management Practices (BMPs). To date, the county has accomplished 80% of the BMP goals (7 individual projects). It continues to acquire land for designated retention areas (DRAs) and now employs a stormwater engineer.

**Duties and Responsibilities of County Administrator:**

- Chief executive officer of a county government with 800 employees in the General Fund, Fire and Rescue, Utilities and Solid Waste, Transportation and Public Works. This also includes emergency management, economic development, planning and land use, parks and recreation, health, social services, human resources, veteran affairs, and stormwater.
- Preparation and administration of the county's operating and capital improvements budget.
- Implementation of Board of Commissioners policies and directives.
- Media representation of the county on television and radio.
- Administration of day-to-day operations as well as long range planning and strategic planning.

**Achievements:**

- Personally authored/developed Hernando County's first Strategic Plan, along with measurement matrix for progress.
- Spearheaded development of county's first long range road paving and redevelopment plan. Took county from paving only two miles of limerock roads per year to over twenty miles per year.
- Responsible for development of county's first Stormwater and Flood Management Plan.
- Restructured county's economic development recruitment process and retention efforts to successfully attract new manufacturing companies and to retain existing companies.

**County Administrator, Newberry SC**

**2004 – 2006**

Newberry is a county with a population of 45,000 covering approximately 700 square miles. It is located adjacent to the Columbia, South Carolina metro area. I-26 traverses the county from Columbia on the east, to Greenville-Spartanburg on the west. This location provides the county with the transportation access to metro airports and seaports necessary to be a major manufacturing center. Also, having borders on Lake Murray and Lake Greenwood has made Newberry County a tourist destination and a desirable retirement community. Both of these sectors are continually developing.

**Duties and Responsibilities as County Administrator:**

- Chief executive officer of a county government with over 400 employees and \$30 million budget. Oversight responsibility for the following functions: roads, stormwater planning, zoning, economic development, parks and recreation, social services, law enforcement, jails and court facilities, finance, general services and personnel.
- Preparation and administration of County's operating and capital budget.
- Implementation of Council directed policy.
- Media representation of the County including appearances on television and radio, interviews with the print media and preparation of press releases.
- Administration of day-to-day operations as well as long range issues.

**Achievements:**

- Restored financial integrity to county owned nursing home and assisted living center by refinancing their bonded indebtedness. Reduced the term of 30 years and rate of 8.875% to 22 years with a 4.625% rate which saved the County \$10,000,000 over the life of the bonds.
- Received the Bond Buyer's 2005 Deal of the Year, and the 2006 J. Mitchell Graham Award from the South Carolina Association of Counties for the above efforts. Due to use of Special Purpose Revenue bonds not using tax dollars. It was recognized as innovative, creative and replicable. I replicated the deal within six months to refinance the bonds of the county owned hospital thereby saving another \$3,000,000 over the life of the bonds.
- Structured acquisition of two new industrial parks for the county comprising over 500 acres. Initially recruited two new industries creating over 200 new jobs and over \$50 million in new tax base.
- Recruited Caterpillar to open plant in one of the county owned industrial parks. The new plant was over 600,000 square feet. Initially, over 150 new jobs were created to build generators. More jobs were promised.
- Renovated County's historic courthouse. Project was over \$2 million and took about two years to complete. Included restoring historic attributes and expanding and finishing the basement for new office space and reconstructing the second floor court room.

**City Manager, City of Concord, NC**

**1985 – 1998**

**Planning and Community Development Director**

**1980 – 1985**

Concord is a city with a population of 89,891 covering approximately 60 square miles. It is located in Cabarrus County, North Carolina which is centrally located in a multi-county metropolitan area with a population of almost 2 million. The population of Concord, as well as the metropolitan area is well diversified. Concord is home to Charlotte Motor Speedway, while the metropolitan area is a national financial center. Concord is a progressive city with a hometown feel visited by millions of tourists each year.

**Duties and Responsibilities as City Manager:**

- Chief executive officer of a municipal government with 700 employees and \$100 million budget. Oversight responsibility for the following functions: police, roads, stormwater drainage, water, sewer and electric utility, parks, recreation, planning, zoning, finance, general services, personnel, fire and aviation.
- Implementation of Council directed policy. Administration of the city's day-to-day operations as well as identification and resolution of long range issues. Oversight of the plans to expand the city's geographic size, population, and industrial/commercial base per the City Council's adopted goals and objectives.
- Preparation and administration of the city's operating and capital budgets.
- Negotiation with public and private sector entities on a variety of issues ranging from economic development and growth to service contracts.
- Media representation of the city including appearances on television and radio, interviews with the print media, and preparation of press releases.
- Responsible for the city's compliance with county, state, and federal regulations such as health, environmental and EEOC.

**Achievements:**

- Restored morale and built a high performance management team by restructuring and developing existing staff. Eliminated a semi-autonomous utility commission to become more responsive to residents' needs per City Council. Morale was improved dramatically by bringing these employees under the city's performance pay plan, and the Council and staff were able to better respond to citizens since we had direct control. Complaints dropped by over 50% within six months.
- Instituted an annual customer satisfaction survey to measure the effectiveness of city services. Integrated the survey into the budget and the performance monitoring process.
- Revamped budget and financial systems. Won the Government Finance Officers' Association's Distinguished Budget Award for twelve consecutive years.
- Restored financial integrity to the water and sewer utility fund. By eliminating the semi-autonomous utility commission, I was able to bring all such operations and budgets under the City Council and City Manager. This allowed us to expand the water and sewer systems to virtually serve the entire county and to triple the size of the electric system. Throughout these efforts, we were able to maintain level utility rates for all three systems.
- Replaced general obligation bonds with revenue bonds to expand the city's water, sewer and electric systems. This was in concert with the City Council's directives to grow the city by statutory annexation. My plans enabled me to meet the Council's expectations to grow the city without raising taxes, from 8 square miles with 16,000 people, to 50 square miles with 50,000 people in about 12 years. My long range plans are still being used by Concord.
- Oversight of planning, financing and development of Concord Regional Airport and Municipal Golf Course. Constructed the \$27 million airport in less than 3 years and the \$8 million golf course simultaneously.



- Recruitment of Concord Mills and oversight of its planning. Concord Mills is a super-regional shopping center with over 1 million square feet under roof. It is now the number one tourist attraction in North Carolina with the Charlotte Motor Speedway in the top six. When I started the planning for this development, there were no hotels located at this I-85 exit, now there are over 1,000 hotel rooms and over 2 million square feet of retail.
- Privatized solid waste collection and landfill operations. Negotiated contract with BFI that resulted in the city not having to pay tipping fees for the life of the landfill for solid waste originating in the city which hosted their private landfill. This saves Concord over \$2 million per year. Initiated city's recycling program.
- Directed efforts to rebuild city's electric system after hurricanes and ice storms. After one hurricane, 90% of city's customers were without power and I led around the clock restoration efforts via mutual aid with other electric cities.

**Planning and Community Development Director, Roanoke Rapids, NC  
Roanoke Chowan Regional Housing Authority and Redevelopment Commission**

**1977 – 1980**

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Oversight of planning, economic development, community development and public housing for Halifax, Northampton and Hertford Counties.
- Preparation of project budgets, grants and programs.
- Management of daily operations and long-range planning.

Achievements:

- Awarded second Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program in North Carolina. This hotel project was the first UDAG project completed in North Carolina. UDAG was a federal program for economic and community development.
- Secured over \$2 million dollars in community and economic development programs per year, as well as over \$4 million for public and senior housing per year.

**OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Jordan Brown Management Corporation**

**2006 – 2012**

Private consulting business I owned and operated.

**Alliance Development Group, LLC, Charlotte, NC**

**2006 – 2012**

ADG specializes in developing single tenant income producing properties. Serving as Chief Operating Officer/Executive Vice-President, I was responsible for project oversight and development. Projects include Quaker Steak and Lube restaurants, Walgreens, Goodyear Auto Centers.

**Hunter and Brown, Inc., Concord, NC**

**1998 – 2003**

Hunter and Brown was a firm co-founded by me. It specialized in the redevelopment of downtown properties and commercial parks. As a firm, we redeveloped over 100,000 square feet of mixed-use space for our company. We also consulted with other developers and municipal governments on development projects. We leased and managed commercial properties for ourselves and other companies.

**EDUCATION**

University of North Carolina, Charlotte

MA Urban Geography

Emphasis on city and county planning and economic development.

University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Bachelor of Arts

Majored in Political Science, minored in Sociology and Psychology. Served as justice on Student Body Court.

North Carolina Institute of Government

Certificate

Received Municipal Administration Certificate.

South Carolina Executive Institute

Certificate

Received certificate from this multi-campus/multi-discipline program which focuses on problem solving.

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILITATIONS**

ICMA member since 1985

Cabarrus Bank & Trust – Board of Directors (Retired)

Concord Downtown Development Corporation – 2008 President and 2007-10 Board of Directors

Pasco Hernando State College Foundation Board

Brooksville Ridge Kiwanis Club Board of Directors, 2018 Recipient of Kiwanian of the Year

Advisory Committee for Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University Brooksville Agricultural & Environmental Research Station (BAERS)

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*Candidate Introduction*

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Leonard B. Sossamon

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**EDUCATION**

Master of Arts, Urban Geography, University of North Carolina Charlotte Bachelor of Arts  
Political Science, University of North Carolina Charlotte Certificate in Municipal Administration,  
University of North Carolina  
Chapel Hill Institute of Government  
Executive Institute Graduate, South Carolina Budget and Control Board

**EXPERIENCE**

County Administrator, Hernando County, Florida	2012-2019
Jordan Brown Management Corporation, Concord, North Carolina	2006-2012
Alliance Development Group, Charlotte, North Carolina	2006-2012
County Administrator, Newberry County, South Carolina	2004-2006
Hunter and Brown, Inc., Concord, North Carolina	1998-2003
City Manager, Concord, North Carolina	1985-1998
Planning and Community Development Director, Concord, North Carolina	1980-1985
Planning and Community Development Director, Roanoke Rapids, NC	1977-1980

**BACKGROUND**

Hernando County's Economic Development team, which I am proud to have led for the past three years, recruited ten new industrial companies to build in the County's business parks. More than five hundred jobs were brought to the County with salaries averaging over 125% of the County's median wages. These recruitments added much needed growth to the County's tax base. New businesses include e-TeleQuote Insurance, Successful Acquisitions, Baker Parts and Airofog USA. Expansion projects include Barrett Outdoor Living/Alumi-Guard, Flagstone Pavers, Surge Suppression, Composite Motors, Premier Pharmacy Labs and Monster Transmissions.

The General Fund budget for Hernando County is \$100 million and the total budget comprises \$449.5 million. Major projects include waste water plant expansion at the County's airport, roadway (approximately 30 miles) and storm water (10-12 miles) projects. The population of the County is 188,500, and there are 850 employees under the responsibility of the County Administrator reporting through twelve directors.

The three most significant issues facing my prior employer were and are:

- Revenue growth. As a bedroom community of Tampa-St Petersburg, the County's population growth has been significant, but the ad valorem tax revenues have not kept pace. This places growing pressure on the General Fund.

Leonard B. Sossamon

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- Waste water plant expansions. As more and more subdivisions are developed, the County's regional waste water plants must be expanded to handle the increased flows.
- Arterial roadways. Several large scale residential and commercial centers have been approved during the past two years. As each is built out, east-west commuting has gotten difficult, leading to citizen complaints and demands for improvements.

### **GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE**

Gainesville offers an exciting opportunity for the right candidate with the necessary background. The location with the University of Florida and a huge football fan base and attendees, along with Santa Fe College, add a youthful vibrancy to the City. I am familiar with cities hosting large sporting venues since the City of Concord, where I served as City Manager, is home to NASCAR's Charlotte Motor Speedway where attendance routinely topped 200,000. Also, during the past seven years, I have developed a great relationship with the University of Florida via my work with UF/IFAS.

The City also provides a great basis for working with the residents to support and improve the quality of life for all Gainesville citizens. In previous governmental posts, I have developed and supported child day care centers and adult day care facilities. I have promoted and developed local sustainability and environmental protection via recycling, land re-use, better housing for the challenged members of the community, and small business and minority business incubation.

Infrastructure renovation, replacement and expansion has been one of my strong points. My successful projects include roads, streets, storm water, utilities, an airport and a golf course. Two of my more unusual successes involved the issuance of Special Purpose Revenue Bonds to refinance the existing debt on the nursing home, independent and assisted living centers, and hospital owned by Newberry County, South Carolina. In addition to saving the County over \$10 million, it provided the avenue to make significant improvements to each facility.

My management style is marked by adaptability and resiliency which includes leading by example. While similar, all cities and counties do have differences. A good manager will observe, evaluate and adapt strategies with the leadership staff in order to move the organization forward. No one person has all the answers, so collaboration is a key to success. Using this approach helped me successfully put together a team which acquired the land, designed and built the Concord Regional Airport in thirty-three months.

Open, approachable, caring and a good listener are just a few words my staff would use to describe me. Employees at all levels of the organization have always felt comfortable talking with me whether in my office, or out in the community. Many of my immediate, administrative staff would say that I am tireless and flexible.

Leonard B. Sossamon

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Most of my elected officials would say that I am energetic in body and mind, and that I am a knowledgeable and extremely capable manager. They would say my financial acumen is strong and innovative at the same time. As an example, while City Manager in Concord, North Carolina, I came up with an idea to reissue general obligation debt as allowed by state law. I was informed I could only reissue the principle that we had paid off the previous year. We challenged the issue in court and won. Several local governments thanked me for being creative and setting a precedent.

I feel my greatest strength is my ability to build consensus through collaboration and cooperation. For decades in Hernando County, only money generated by the airport was used for its infrastructure needs, and that money was not enough to expand the roadways to support new economic development on the airport grounds. After some research, I learned the roads and streets located within the airport's 2,400 acres had not been dedicated as public county roadways. Building a team from the County's Legal, Airport, Public Works, Utilities and Finance Departments (the last of which is part of the County Clerk's Office), necessary rights of ways were identified and properly recorded as public. The result is general transportation trust and gas tax funds are now used to build new and upgrade existing roads on the airport grounds. We could also then use utility funds to expand the utility system and development on the airport grounds became viable.

Through patience and perseverance, I was able to convince a large holding company from the Washington, D.C. area to build a 200,000 square foot, cold storage facility in Hernando County. When completed, it will add \$35 million to the tax base and employ over 100 people.

My tendency to give everyone a second or third chance can be considered a weakness. I recognize this and now work to be more diligent in evaluating and accepting the capabilities and limitations of the person.

When my staff and I developed the Hernando County Strategic Plan, we decided on several metrics for measuring our progress and success. One was the number of miles of roads paved or resurfaced every year. Another was the number of jobs recruited and retained each year, as well as the amount of new and expanded manufacturing space developed.

I have two achievements (so far) which I consider to be among my biggest and most effective. With health care costs rising for the employees of companies including cities and counties, I decided to go on offense. With my human resources staff in Hernando County, we explored options and settled on developing a County Wellness Center. It proved to save the County and its employees hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly. All constitutional officer employees and employees of the City of Brooksville also joined the Wellness Program. My other biggest achievement is the previously mentioned development of the Concord Regional Airport. I was successful in putting together a great team of Concord staff and consultants to complete the project in less than three years. This airport's annual contribution to the North Carolina economy is approaching \$ 1 billion dollars.

Leonard B. Sossamon

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My first failure was in economic development. Our local Cabarrus County Chamber Executive and I were recruiting a large Japanese electronics company. It would have meant over 1,000 new jobs and a significant tax base. After a couple months of showing sites and making presentations, the company chose another county. We were devastated because we knew we had the best site and location. I learned to not take it personally and that I cannot always win. From that point forward, we were successful recruiting firms like Pass & Seymour, Oiles America, Sysco Foods, and FedEx. Also, I recruited the Mills Corporation to build the Concord Mills Mall which encompasses 1 million square feet of retail space under roof.

Yes, I have had to fire people. I never enjoy the process but realize that it sometimes is the only answer to a situation. I do it with compassion and never in anger.

The greatest challenges in years to come for the next Gainesville City Manager will be financial. It is obvious that no one wants to raise taxes, yet we all know that costs continue to rise in many cases faster than revenue growth. Not only does this negatively impact the delivery of traditional municipal services, but also additional assistance to society's most vulnerable. Attention and consideration must be seriously given to revenue generators like fees in lieu of taxes and/or payments in lieu of taxes to bridge the gap.

I have a reputation of creating work by looking for ways to improve operations and finances. Tightening up contracts or rebidding contracts to secure better pricing is a way to ensure the City will receive the biggest bang for the buck. Also, refinancing debt to save my communities significant dollars has been one of my strong points. I did this several times in Hernando County, and I was able to save Newberry County, South Carolina at least \$10 million by refinancing its debt on its nursing home, assisted and independent living facilities. I replicated the savings by refinancing the County owned hospital's bonds. This innovative approach won the County several major awards including the Bond Buyers Deal of the Year.

During the first six months, my efforts will include:

- Meeting with staff, elected officials, citizen groups, and where appropriate county/state officials to assess City operations, concerns, positions and dynamics;
- Formulating the appropriate strategic direction based on the Commission's goals and objectives;
- Assessing the City's financial strength and projecting future revenue trends;
- Developing strategies and action plans for growing the City's economic base;
- Reviews of current performance measures, and where necessary, developing additional measures that will be used to determine if staff and I are meeting the goals of the organization and Commissioners, and exceeding the expectations of the citizens.

Working well and extensively with the media is one of my strong points. It is always best to ensure accurate, quality coverage for the citizens we serve. I have had regular meetings with the local

Leonard B. Sossamon

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press and made appearances on television and radio talk shows to discuss my city or county's progress, particularly in terms of economic development initiatives and recruitments.

Most, if not all, public sector managers have detractors. I have had my share. That said, there is nothing true in my background that would embarrass the City.

In my leisure time, my wife and I enjoy traveling. We also cook and bake together. While I was responsible for developing a golf course for Concord, NC, I do not play well or often; but I do enjoy it. My wife and I love long walks on the beach, and the beach music associated with a dance style (Shag) still popular with the Carolina coastal area.

**SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES I WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE MYSELF**

- Ethical
- Innovative/Creative
- Proactive
- Diligent
- Accessible
- Enthusiastic

**REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION**

My contract was terminated after the most recent election due to political motives. Hernando County has a long history of using reserves from the General Fund to balance the budget. After 20 years of this practice, and despite repeated warnings from me and other prior County Administrators, the General Fund Reserves have been severely depleted. It was convenient for them to accuse me of not informing the Commissioners of the situation. In actuality, the local newspaper (Tampa Bay Times) recorded at least ten times over the past two years when I did so during Board meetings. Since my dismissal, several citizens have played recordings from those BOCC meetings during public comments demonstrating I had warned the Commission repeatedly.

**CURRENT/MOST RECENT SALARY**

My final, annual salary at Hernando County was \$219,400.



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*CB&A Background Checks*

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**Background Check Summary for  
LEONARD B. SOSSAMON**

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**Criminal Records Checks:**

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Hernando County, FL	No Records Found
Cabarrus County, NC	No Records Found
Davidson County, NC	No Records Found
Mecklenburg County, NC	No Records Found
Newberry County, SC	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
North Carolina	No Records Found
South Carolina	No Records Found

**Civil Records Checks:**

County	
Hernando County, FL	No Records Found
Cabarrus County, NC	No Records Found
Davidson County, NC	No Records Found
Mecklenburg County, NC	No Records Found
Newberry County, SC	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found
North Carolina	1990 – Civil Rights, Other law suit filed against the City of Concord, NC including Mr. Sossamon in his capacity as City Manager <i>Disposition</i> = November 1993, Case Dismissed in favor of City
South Carolina	April 2006 - Other law suit filed against the County of Newberry, SC including Mr. Sossamon in his capacity as County Administrator <i>Disposition</i> = December 2006 – Dismissed with Prejudice by Newberry County

*\*See Next Page for Candidate  
Explanation of Records Found*

**Background Check Summary for  
LEONARD B. SOSSAMON**

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**Motor Vehicle**

Florida

March 2019 – Pending Suspension  
related to PIP Insurance

**Credit**

Very Good

**Bankruptcy**

No Records Found

**Education**

Confirmed

**Employment**

Confirmed

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern.

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During my tenure as City Manager for the City of Concord, North Carolina, an employee who was dismissed filed a lawsuit against the City, the department head responsible for the dismissal, the City Council and me as City Manager. The lawsuit alleged that the former employee was not afforded proper “due process”. The former employee had the suit dismissed by the Court and we were all cleared of any alleged wrongful actions.

Also, during my tenure as County Administrator for Newberry County, South Carolina, a department head resigned due to some unpleasant circumstances which he created. He also filed a lawsuit naming the County and me as County Administrator. He alleged that he was not afforded proper “due process”. This suit was also dismissed by the Court and we were cleared of any alleged wrongful actions.

Please advise if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

  
Leonard B. Sossamon

**Background Check Summary for  
LEONARD B. SOSSAMON  
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: Leonard B. Sossamon

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?  
Yes  No
- 2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?  
Yes  No
- 3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?  
Yes  No  Cabernet Holdings, LLC (corporate)
- 4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes  No
- 5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes  No
- 6. Have you ever been convicted of driving while intoxicated?  
Yes  No
- 7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?  
Yes  No
- 8. Do you have a personal My Space, Face Book or other type of Web Page?  
Yes  No  LinkedIn
- 9. Do you have a personal Twitter Account?  
Yes  No
- 10. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?  
Yes  No

11. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Jonathan Vane vs Leonard B. Sossamon  
Cabarrus County, NC

Attested to:

Leonard B. Sossamon  
Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to Lynelle@cb-asso.com or via fax to (888) 539-6531 no later than 5:00 PM PST 08/12/19.

(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

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*CB&A Reference Notes*

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**Reference Notes  
Leonard “Len” B. Sossamon**

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**Wayne Dukes – Commissioner, Hernando County, FL 352-263-8353**

Mr. Dukes was the Chairman when Mr. Sossamon was hired and helped negotiate his contract. However, all of the Commissioners liked Mr. Sossamon. He has a robust background compared to others because he had been in the private sector and also served as an elected official. He completely involved himself in the community. He attended chamber and volunteer events. Everyone who knew him liked him for the most part. The few people who did not care for him wanted to control the Commission. Mr. Sossamon earned every one of the outstanding marks that Mr. Dukes gave him in his performance reviews.

In 2012 the federal government wanted to give \$22 billion dollars to five states. The Governor of Florida dealt with the money but wanted a member from each County to be in a Consortium. Mr. Sossamon joined the consortium in 2012. He is very smart and has a deep understanding because of his background.

If Mr. Dukes had his way, Mr. Sossamon would still be the County Manager in Hernando. He brought a great deal to the County. They had a close relationship, talked frequently, and attended events together. Mr. Sossamon is solid and sound, an outstanding administrator.

Hernando County will be hard pressed to find an Administrator of Mr. Sossamon’s caliber to replace him. He brought so much to the organization. Even when disciplining employees, he dealt with people in a way where they did not leave feeling bad about themselves. When he gave staff instructions, they knew they needed to do it and he did not have to tell them twice.

The person they had in charge of Economic Development (ED) did not have the right background and was not getting anything done. Mr. Sossamon tried to mentor him, but he did not want to grow and so he resigned. They looked at a few candidates but none of the Commissioners liked them. The Commission asked Mr. Sossamon to take on the ED responsibilities for half the salary of the previous Director. For years he ran economic development while being the Administrator. The former ED Director had a secretary but never gave her the chance to use her skillset or grow. The first thing Mr. Sossamon did when he took over was to allow her to grow. Because of his efforts, she can now be an Economic development Director anywhere.

Hernando County has a good Human Resource Director and Mr. Sossamon worked well with them. He never picked sides or favorites and he lets employees do their job which was appreciated by the staff. Because of his diverse background he came up with ideas that no one had ever thought of before.

Mr. Sossamon keeps others informed and never wants the Board to be surprised. He worked well with people who have different personalities. When someone is combative with him, his voice changes a little but that is it. He is a true southern gentleman. A community with 4,000 houses and a huge golf course would not work with the Utilities Director and escorted him off the property. Mr. Dukes asked Mr. Sossamon to go with him. They spent a few hours in the community and by the end they agreed with the County. His personality warms up even those who are combative.

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**Leonard “Len” B. Sossamon**

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The County shared a building with the Courthouse but needed more room. Mr. Sossamon gave them multiple solutions but the Commissioners were not able to make a decision and move forward. He is a problem solver and sees what is coming next.

Hernando was still struggling from the economic downturn and they were in over their head. Mr. Sossamon brought them multiple solutions but none of the Commissioners listened. Hernando County has constitutional offices like the Sheriff’s office which receives 52% of the budget. The Sheriff is very close to two Commissioners. When a reduction in force was presented, the Commissioners protected the Sheriff and would not allow reductions in his department. The local District Manager for the electric company stood up on Mr. Sossamon’s behalf.

Mr. Sossamon has not been involved in anything controversial and absolutely nothing in his conduct would concern a reasonable person. The people who sided with the Sheriff were the minority on the Council but it was well known that if they got their majority, they would let Mr. Sossamon go. They finally got the numbers to remove him and the whole County was shocked. The whole atmosphere has changed since Mr. Sossamon left.

Mr. Sossamon is one of the best Administrators Hernando County has ever had and Mr. Dukes would rehire Mr. Sossamon immediately. He will do a good job for whoever hires him and everyone will like him.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Articulate,
- Timely,
- Very intelligent,
- Great background in finance and knowledge,
- Great with personnel,
- Always courteous with others, and
- Makes others feel comfortable.

**Strengths:** Knowledge, background, finance, personnel, treats others nicely, nice person to work with, stands up for himself, disciplines staff in a way that is not belittling or embarrassing.

**Weaknesses:** Tells you exactly how things are which Mr. Dukes appreciated but some of the other Commissioners did not take it well.

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**Garth Coller – County Attorney, Hernando County, FL 352-540-6430**

Mr. Coller has been the County Attorney for Hernando County since 2000. Mr. Coller is the in-house attorney as well as the prosecutor. Mr. Sossamon was hired as the Administrator. Mr.

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Coller has worked with 11 County Administrators who were either temporary or permanent. Mr. Sossamon is at the top of the list in terms of skill and ability.

When hiring personnel Mr. Sossamon rates in the mid to upper range. The Board has limited the resources and an Administrator cannot hire the best candidates without the resources to do so. Most of Mr. Sossamon’s hires were as expected considering the resources he had. His decisions were very good. He maintains an organization at a high level.

When working with the public Mr. Sossamon did extremely well. He was very charming and members in the community tried to get the votes to retain Mr. Sossamon, which reflects on how well the public viewed him.

Mr. Sossamon is one of the Administrators who are smart enough to let the Attorney know what they are going to do before they do it, rather than ask permission after. He realized which decisions needed legal input and did not waste Mr. Coller’s time unnecessarily. When the situation seemed risky Mr. Sossamon brought legal in.

Mr. Sossamon is primarily a leader and less of a manager. He is a good manager from behind the desk but he was a leader who made changes where he thought they were wise. In terms of business development, he emphasized the need to broaden the tax base. He warned Commissioners that cutting budgets would hurt them in the long run, and it did but they blamed him for it.

Hernando County had a historically significant property on land owned by the state. Even with a zero budget he managed to put together a group of members of the public to take it over as a guild. They ran it on a shoestring and it is now generating revenue, mostly because of Mr. Sossamon. He has good financial skills.

Mr. Sossamon responds remarkably well to stress. He did not see the move to terminate his employment coming and he still handled it very well. He politely defended himself when nonfactual statements were made and was more gracious than most people would have been.

You cannot be a County Administrator without controversy, but nothing unusual happened. The most controversial item in Mr. Sossamon’s past was a political fight with a local power broker who spent a fortune trying to oust Mr. Sossamon. He put signs up with every election calling Mr. Sossamon a liar, which was not true but it took a toll on the Commissioners. The opposing party on the Commissioner managed to get the three votes needed to terminate Mr. Sossamon’s employment. It was very much a surprise and very hard for the County.

Even the Commissioners who voted to let him go gave him remarkably good evaluations in terms of his skillset and abilities. Residents want to be given everything they want and when the Administrator has to say no, they strongly hold it against them. Enough of these interactions over time will lead to the Administrator’s demise. Mr. Sossamon was the longest serving Administrator of Mr. Coller’s tenure. Very few lasted longer than three years and some not even two.



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Mr. Collier volunteered to be a reference for Mr. Sossamon when he learned of the Board’s decision. He gladly speaks the truth on Mr. Sossamon’s behalf.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Calm,
- Thoughtful,
- Smart,
- Gracious,
- Good humored,
- Good personality, and
- Likeable man.

**Strengths:** Very charming, very good with the public, good communicator, decisive, understands the professionalism the job needs, terrific with business development, charming. He was a favorite of the general public, and he communicates well with Commissioners and the public which is not always the same skill.

**Weaknesses:** Trusted people more than he should. Politicians can be remarkably good at misleading you to believing you are safe when you are not and Mr. Sossamon was caught up in that.

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**Tina Duenninger – Executive Office Manager, Hernando County, FL 352-346-4256**

Ms. Duenninger met Mr. Sossamon in 2012. Mr. Sossamon is very detail oriented, very high energy, and a go getter. He is very intelligent. She has worked for Hernando County since 1999 and no other Administrator compares to him in terms of intellect and style.

They use a hiring panel of three people but Mr. Sossamon has the final say. He made good decisions both when hiring and in general. He is innovative. When he first came to the County, he restructured the organization to streamline processes and introduced a strategic plan which the County did not have. He measured the organization by the strategic plan and saw where the County was falling short.

Mr. Sossamon frequently spoke at homeowners’ associations, various community summits, and local Hernando County events. He is a very eloquent speaker and was in high demand. He kept everyone informed and was a leader who rallied employees around the strategic plan.

Hernando County has issues on a daily basis. Mr. Sossamon might be dealing with landfill issues, animal shelter issues, and personnel issues at the same time. Every day brought a multitude of issues which he was very adept in addressing.

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Mr. Sossamon has good financial skills and is always responsive. His emails come in at all sorts of hours, late at night and early in the morning. He does not just work 8 to 5.

Hernando County always has controversy and is very political, which led to Mr. Sossamon’s departure but was not of his making. Nothing about his conduct or background would concern an employer.

During Ms. Duenninger’s tenure she witnessed employees when many Administrators left the organization but Mr. Sossamon’s departure was different because employees were crying actual tears. Not just regular staff members but department managers as well. His impact was significant.

Ms. Duenninger would hire Mr. Sossamon. Hernando County has 857 employees and most of them would agree with the statements in this reference. Anyone would be crazy not to hire Mr. Sossamon, he is just really wonderful and they were sorry to see him leave.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Intelligent,
- Eloquent,
- Kind hearted,
- Go getter,
- Leader, and
- Planner – likes to plan ahead of time.

**Strengths:** Very calm in stressful situations, takes time to get the point across, very personable, treats the custodial staff the same as he treats elected officials.

**Weaknesses:** He does not like to say no and will take on more than he should have. He played the role of Economic Development Director as well as Administrator. Sometimes he should say no.

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**Pat Crowley – President, Chamber of Commerce, Hernando County, FL 352-584-3351  
352-796-0697**

Ms. Crowley has been the President of the Chamber of Commerce since 2000. She participated in one of the interview Committees when Mr. Sossamon was hired in Hernando County.

Mr. Sossamon’s strengths is very much in collaborative efforts and working with people. He is very community minded and had a presence in the community. The County has a population of 187k and they are a suburban rural area. A good percentage of their population is retirees. It is a very close knit community for leaders and business owners in the community. He was very active and present. He participated in community events and attended functions.

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Managing a community of stoic people who do not want change is difficult. However, Mr. Sossamon is innovative and tried to move the County forward while maintaining a good balance between the residents who had lived there for a long time and the new, more transient, diversified population with different ideas. He is visionary.

The Chamber does not collaborate with the County on many items, but they meet now and again. They have a government affairs director who spent a great deal of time with the County Commissioners and also with Mr. Sossamon. He believes in collaborating and working together. He offers the olive branch to make it happen.

The Chamber is a free standing entity with no funding through the City or County, they rely totally on their membership. They have a collaborative partnership with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of South Florida in Tampa. They began to partner with the County to fund this program but had to negotiate whether the County would pay for it every year. Mr. Sossamon was supportive of the program because he realized that it was important for economic development. He included the program as part of the economic development program so the Chamber did not have to renegotiate County funding every year which was very appreciated.

Mr. Sossamon seems to have good financial skills, Ms. Crowley is not involved in the budget process enough to be certain. They only worked together on economic development, for which Mr. Sossamon had definite expertise and met deadlines. He always had a smile and his staff never said a negative word about how he managed them.

The Board was constantly changing and they terminated Mr. Sossamon’s contract. He knows how to work with a Board, but they had some challenges which were political in nature. Ms. Crowley is not aware of anything negative in Mr. Sossamon’s background and she never saw him do anything inappropriate.

Mr. Crowley would definitely consider hiring Mr. Sossamon in a different situation with a different Board. He did an exceptional job of moving the County forward. Their County is comprised primarily of lower income folks who do not want their taxes raised. He did a great job maintaining balance between these residents while still addressing the effects of the recession.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Dynamic,
- Positive,
- Outgoing,
- Collaborative,
- Strong leader,
- Fun, and
- Always has a smile.

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**Strengths:** Very community minded, very much a collaborator, very outgoing personality, very positive person which is important in government, good listener, mediator who created a win/win for everyone.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Barbara Behrendt – Reporter, Hernando County, FL 352-848-1434**

Ms. Behrendt covers County Government in Hernando County. She first met Mr. Sossamon when he applied to the position and made the finalist list.

Mr. Sossamon was always very truthful in their interactions. He had detractors and supporters, which is common for political figures. Hernando County is very political and you cannot avoid running afoul of one side or another of the powers that be. The current Commission believes that Mr. Sossamon is terrible with money while others say that the Commission is responsible for deciding how the money is spent.

Mr. Sossamon’s decisions were good, he never made any decision that was in his own personal best interest. He was visible in the community and he got along with everyone. He is very personable but will not stop talking about BBQ when it is mentioned. Reporters in the area know not to bring it up in an interview or they never get back to the topic at hand.

While Mr. Sossamon never went out of his way to contact Ms. Behrendt, he was always very responsive to her and even gave her his cell phone number. If she sent him questions via email, even on items that most managers consider painful like looking at what the County accomplished in the past year, he was always gracious and made time for her.

When the Board let Mr. Sossamon go, he had plenty of ammunition he could have used against them. He was blunt and honest because he needed to be. When Ms. Behrendt interviewed him after the fact about his departure, he was honest but not spiteful.

Mr. Sossamon’s job is controversial. The people against him believed he was a terrible economic development director, but the people who supported him listed all of his economic development achievements. In politics it is all about who has the majority vote, he had it for a long time and then he did not.

Administrators in Hernando County typically last about two years, but Mr. Sossamon did not get caught in that cycle because he can relate to others. Even people who had negative things to say about his work felt like he was a nice man. Mr. Sossamon survived a long time in a difficult political environment.

Ms. Crowley was uncomfortable providing phrases and adjectives as they are value judgments. In her role as a reporter she has to remain non biased.

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**Strengths:** Always truthful and always fair.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Tim Lowder - Former Assistant City Manager, City of Concord, NC 704-564-3196**

Mr. Lowder first met Mr. Sossamon in 1989 when Mr. Sossamon hired him as the Director of Engineering for the City of Concord. He was promoted a few years later to Assistant City Manager and worked with Mr. Sossamon until he left in 1998. They continue to have contact on a professional as well as a personal level.

Mr. Lowder enjoyed working for Mr. Sossamon. He is a progressive and forward thinker. While working together they handled over \$100 million worth of projects including the construction of a new airport, public works building, and golf course.

Mr. Sossamon quickly reads and assesses people exceptionally well. He allows his staff members to do their jobs without micro-managing. He delegates well, but is not afraid to roll up his sleeves and work alongside his team. He is excellent at hiring personnel and is quite loyal, always looking out for the best interest of his staff. While working for Mr. Sossamon, Mr. Lowder felt he was part of one of the best teams he has ever been on. He always does thorough research on each candidate so that he hires the best person for each position.

Mr. Sossamon does not shy away from decision making and goes forward with confidence once a decision is made. During his tenure he had to make several tough financial choices. One involved the Concord Regional Airport. The County wanted to terminate the project. However, he knew how important the project would be for the financial stability of Concord. He proposed a new plan which involved Concord taking over the project and building the airport. To accomplish this, he secured almost \$24 million worth of grant money to provide the funding base. He and his team were tremendously successful with this venture as the airport is now the 4<sup>th</sup> busiest airport in the State exclusively handling private traffic. This forward thinking not only demonstrates his great decision making ability but also how innovative he is. If a project needs to get done, he makes sure it happens.

Mr. Sossamon always kept Mr. Lowder informed about what was happening through regular staff, budget planning, and other meetings. He keeps the necessary people in the loop, and everyone always knows where they stand with him. He is a stickler about being on time. Therefore, he consistently completes all tasks in a timely manner.

Mr. Sossamon has experience with the public and handles the residents in the community especially well. He is enormously popular in the area and gets along with people from all walks of life. Customer service is one of his highest priorities. He put several policies into place to improve customer service practices in Concord. One he implemented was the consolidation of

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most administrative calls into one call center rather than having them transferred to all the various departments. This procedure proved much more efficient for both the community and City staff.

Mr. Sossamon is a talented problem solver. Government relations can become restricted due to budgeting or policy issues, but Mr. Sossamon is clever at figuring out how to solve problems. One example involved the City’s peak power surcharge issues which affected the entire City grid. He had the City build two \$80 million generation stations which in turn produced a savings to the City and its residents of \$250,000 per month. This project paid for itself within 5 years of completion.

Mr. Lowder is not aware of anything in Mr. Sossamon’s past which would be considered controversial or embarrassing if the press went digging. He is a fantastic Manager. Mr. Lowder would hire him without any hesitation.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Personable,
- Respectful,
- Loyal,
- Good leader,
- Conservative, and
- Politically savvy.

**Strengths:** Very progressive; knowledgeable in his field.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Susan Fellers – Former Clerk to Newberry County Council, Prosperity, SC 803-364-4048**

Ms. Fellers and Mr. Sossamon first met when he was hired in Newberry County in 2004. They were the only two people hired by the County Council, and they worked together closely until he left in 2006 to take care of his ailing father. She occasionally acted as his assistant and reported to the Council as well as to Mr. Sossamon. They had a superb working relationship and continue to have personal contact.

Mr. Sossamon’s job performance was wonderful. He worked well with elected officials and his department heads. He was fair and cared equally for his staff and County constituents. He was excellent with economic development. He pushed for advancement throughout the County to bring in new industry. Jobs were not plentiful in the area; so he continually looked for ways to make it easier on residents by bringing in new businesses. These efforts enabled more residents to remain in the County as opposed to always commuting outside its boundaries for employment. Mr. Sossamon’s strengths include his fairness and admirable staff relations. He makes outstanding decisions when hiring personnel. He always listens before making decisions and cares about each

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staff member, no matter their position. He does not micro-manage but rather expects his staff to do their jobs, only getting involved if an issue arises. With these commendable attributes, all his employees greatly respect him.

Mr. Sossamon makes good decisions and always talks through issues with the appropriate parties before moving forward. He takes a team approach when major decisions must be made within the organization and includes all department heads in the process. He can deal with whatever is thrown in his direction. He is a splendid problem solver. He and Ms. Fellers often acted as sounding boards for each other to resolve Council issues.

Mr. Sossamon keeps everyone informed of and involved in what is going on. They worked so closely that it was imperative to keep each other up to date. Whenever he was out of the office she was confident taking care of business because she always knew exactly what was happening in his area of responsibility.

Mr. Sossamon has a vast amount of experience dealing with the public and is definitely customer service oriented. Handling distressed residents is one of his strong suits. He remains calm and listens to individual concerns. By the end of the conversation the situation has been diffused and the customer leaves satisfied. He is tremendously outgoing and conducted enormous amounts of positive public relations for Newberry. Ms. Fellers recalls when the County was proceeding towards selling the retirement home it operated. Residents of the facility became incredibly upset. He stayed calm and collected during the Council meeting then went out to the facility the following day to smooth things over. This was not part of his job, but he cared deeply for each individual within his jurisdiction.

Mr. Sossamon is definitely innovative. The County only had one industrial park when he arrived and he did not consider this financially optimistic. A major interstate runs right through Newberry; so he proposed the County take more advantage of this opportunity. He suggested the Council acquire more land to attract more businesses to the area. The Council was not willing to spend the money at first but eventually listened to his advice and agreed to move forward with the purchase. Not long after purchasing the land Mr. Sossamon sealed a deal with a company from England to come to Newberry.

Mr. Sossamon is not one to drag his feet. He ensures tasks are done properly and in a timely manner. Sometimes loopholes arise which are beyond his control, but he puts hard effort into working through the concerns to get the job done. Mr. Sossamon was so effective that 95% of the Council’s goals were accomplished by the end of the year.

Ms. Fellers is not aware of anything in Mr. Sossamon’s past history which could be construed as unfavorable or would be looked at as unflattering if researched by the press. The Sherriff is the only person who might possibly disagree with what she has stated. She is unsure what transpired between the two of them, but it possibly could have been an issue regarding funding where Mr. Sossamon had to refuse the Sherriff’s requests. Mr. Sossamon is an excellent Manager. Given the chance, she would definitely hire him.

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Leonard “Len” B. Sossamon

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**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Dedicated,
- Loyal,
- Caring,
- Trustworthy,
- Dependable, and
- Enthusiastic.

**Strengths:** Outstanding people skills; a brilliant listener.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Alan O’Neal – Former Administrator, Charleston County, SC 843-926- 6944**

Mr. Sossamon interviewed and hired Mr. O’Neal in 1978 to be his assistant at the Roanoke Chowan Regional Housing Authority and Redevelopment Commission. He worked for Mr. Sossamon in this capacity approximately 2 years. They continue to remain colleagues and friends. Mr. Sossamon was exceedingly bright, calm, fair, and balanced.

By nature, Mr. Sossamon is intelligent and applies his brain power to practical matters. He is brilliant but careful when making hiring decisions. His judgments are all based on good information. He does not hesitate but is thoughtful and analytical when a choice is before him.

Mr. Sossamon communicates well. He is personable and comfortable talking to anyone. He transcends all levels of society and organizations. A person does not last long in a position such as his if they are not experienced and good at dealing with the public. His longevity speaks for itself in this regard. He is definitely customer service oriented. Mr. O’Neal had the chance to observe that first hand while they worked together. Mr. Sossamon is concerned about issues raised by the public, and he responds to customers’ needs in a genuine, careful manner.

Evidence of Mr. Sossamon’s innovation can be seen in the type of city Concord is now. He took it from an incredibly small textile town to a major player in the region, all in a 13 year period. Amazing events occurred. He was instrumental in expanding many public/private partnerships. Two of these were the Charlotte Motor Speedway and the Mills Outlet Mall. Both have become major destinations in the State. He was a key player in the downtown revitalization and redevelopment projects. He helped expand the population and city limits over a short period which in turn brought massive amounts of revenue to Concord. He has a quiet personality but is still a fantastic promoter who brought a great deal of energy to the City.

A priority for Mr. Sossamon was always to keep his staff, the elected officials and the public aware of what was happening in the City. He held routine staff meetings to inform them of issues and



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projects which kept the organization moving forward. He met with the elected body regularly and informed the constituents about issues through public meetings and forums.

One of Mr. Sossamon’s major strengths is problem solving. He has a talent for taking a complex issue and breaking it down into smaller pieces. If the need arises, he will delegate, all the while working on his end of the problem until a solution is reached. He always conducted this process in a smooth and professional manner.

Mr. O’Neal is not aware of anything which would be considered embarrassing or controversial in Mr. Sossamon’s past. Given the chance he would absolutely hire him. In fact, when Mr. O’Neal was applying for his current position he was fearful Mr. Sossamon was on the list of candidates, because that would have lowered his chances of getting the job.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Smart,
- Reliable,
- Self-confident without being arrogant,
- Promoter,
- Not afraid of challenges, and
- Represents an organization well.

**Strengths:** Can break down complex tasks to accomplish goals; has outstanding communication skills.

**Weaknesses:** If any it is his tendency to overwork himself and take on too much at once.

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**Gary Pope - Attorney, Pope Flynn, Columbia, SC 803-924-1545**

Mr. Pope first met Mr. Sossamon in 2003 when he was interviewing for his position in Newberry County. He worked with him as the County Attorney during Mr. Sossamon’s entire tenure in Newberry. They continue to have occasional personal contact.

Being a County Administrator is particularly difficult. No training is given, and an individual assuming such a position is frequently forced to learn everything on the job. Mr. Sossamon did a most excellent job because he brought an incredible amount of experience from his previous positions. He worked well with the County Council and his staff. He was fantastic at keeping everyone abreast of all the issues and managing his staff.

Mr. Sossamon is experienced in his field and fantastic at consensus building. He keeps his eyes on the ball and has the vision to move his organization forward. He was involved in a project for highway development and, under his direction; the County put together a deal to purchase 465

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acres of land with bond money. The land was owned by 11 different individuals; so this was no small feat. He got everyone on board, and the purchase had very little impact on the taxpayers. The land is now ready to be used as an industrial park, once the economy improves.

Mr. Sossamon is a tremendous decision maker who does not vacillate. He has a proper sense of timing. When a situation warrants immediate attention, he makes an on-the-spot decision. However, if time is not an issue, he takes his time to do the proper research to make a solid, smart choice.

For example, the County owned a retirement home on shaky financial ground. It was not self-sustaining when Mr. Sossamon arrived in Newberry. He stepped in and arranged for the debt service payments to be reduced. The County won an award for this in 2005. It was declared the best bond deal by Bond Buyer Magazine.

Mr. Sossamon handled inherited personnel problems remarkably well, and the people he hired always performed impressively. He maintains his organization at a high performance level while keeping a vision of what needs to be accomplished. He brought this vision from Concord to Newberry and tried his best to make things happen. However, at times he ran into obstacles with elected officials who interfered with the wise use of tax dollars. He will not change for the sake of changing. He is thoughtful about his organization and builds morale within it.

Mr. Pope was given the task of showing Mr. Sossamon the ropes when he first arrived in Newberry. Their offices were located in the same hallway, which made for easy communication. They conferred several times per day in addition to exchanging emails when necessary.

Mr. Sossamon has a vast amount of experience with the public. He is not cynical. He is tremendously honest, even tempered, and willing to listen to people. He always provides his full attention to anyone communicating with him. He has no problem attending civic meetings after business hours, and he even enjoys these opportunities to meet and discuss issues with constituents.

Mr. Sossamon addresses issues and tasks in a timely manner. He jumps right on things to tackle concerns and takes care of the projects he has organized. When resolving problems he practices an open door policy for Commissioners, his staff and citizens. He does not make prior judgments when issues arise. He first seeks information and analyzes what needs to be done before he decides either to take care of it himself or delegate the matter to the proper department or staff member.

For example, when the Sherriff’s new building was completed, a horrible mold problem was discovered. Mr. Sossamon moved the Sherriff and his entire staff to temporary mobile homes without losing any regular or emergency services. He and his staff accomplished this while simultaneously addressing the mold situation in the building and getting rid of it.

The only controversy Mr. Pope could recall was not of Mr. Sossamon’s making. It mostly involved a situation in which property was being reassessed for tax purposes. Any anger was focused on the elected officials. During his tenure he was named in only one lawsuit involving the County.

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This dealt with the termination of an administrator at the retirement home. This person had not been forthcoming about his background and refused to attend disciplinary sessions. This administrator subsequently sued the County, but it was settled as a nuisance case.

Mr. Pope is aware that one of Mr. Sossamon’s businesses filed for bankruptcy, and he was in litigation with one of his partners. It has since been resolved.

Mr. Sossamon is the best administrator Mr. Pope has ever worked with in the County. Mr. Pope would hire him without hesitation. He highly recommends Mr. Sossamon for a Manager position.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Competent,
- Honest,
- Self-assured,
- People person,
- Visionary, and
- Gets things done.

**Strengths:** Has the vision to see what can be accomplished and the drive to make it happen.

**Weaknesses:** Needs more stage presence when speaking publicly; sometimes too trusting.

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**Andy Morris – Former Newberry County Council Member, Newberry, SC 803-276-2670**

Mr. Morris first met Mr. Sossamon when he had just been elected to the Newberry County Council on a special election to replace another Council Member. This was during the time Mr. Sossamon was going through the interview process in late 2003. They worked together the entire time Mr. Sossamon was the County Administrator, and they still have occasional contact.

Mr. Sossamon is a visionary who was the right person at the right time to get things done in Newberry. He can be a bit of a workaholic, but he only has the best interest of the community at heart. Mr. Morris truly enjoyed working with him. They tended to think alike on many levels.

Mr. Sossamon sorts through mundane tasks to identify the more important issues and get things done in a timely manner. Mr. Morris worked with him as the main point of contact with the County and never encountered any problems with him. If Mr. Morris ever needed anything, he never hesitated to call Mr. Sossamon who always kept him informed about all pertinent issues.

Mr. Sossamon is exceptionally innovative. This showed in the future planning skills he brought to the table. He has a tremendous background and a vast amount of job experience. During the budgeting process in Newberry he was forced to make most of the hard decisions then laid them

**Reference Notes**  
**Leonard “Len” B. Sossamon**

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out in front of the Commissioners without hesitation. Fortunately, the Council followed his advice and was rewarded with positive financial outcomes. He is incredibly creative with project financing.

Mr. Sossamon is also tremendous at working with the public. He has fantastic people skills and is especially concerned about customer service. When he makes decisions or solves problems he is quite impressive. He weighs all the pros and cons before moving forward with a solution or decision. He is not afraid to make tough political choices.

Mr. Morris is not aware of anything in Mr. Sossamon’s background that would be controversial or embarrassing if he were investigated by the press. The only reason he left the County was to care for his elderly parents. Given the chance, he would hire Mr. Sossamon. He is a good Manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Len Sossamon:**

- Outgoing,
- Friendly,
- Pro-active,
- Visionary,
- People person, and
- Involved.

**Strengths:** Hard working; not hesitant to share; makes his community visions come to pass.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Prepared by:** Heather Linares and Lynelle Klein  
Colin Baenziger & Associates

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*CB&A Internet Research*

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**LEONARD B. SOSSAMON**  
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Tampa Bay Times  
February 21, 2019

**You need ‘the skin of an alligator’: How Hernando County’s warring factions sunk another administrator**

Author: Barbara Behrendt

BROOKSVILLE — When **Len Sossamon** was fired as Hernando County administrator on Jan. 29, it was just as predicted when he took the job in 2012. Hernando County, he was told, devoured its administrators. The head-hunter advertising the position urged candidates to have "the skin of an alligator." **Sossamon** became the ninth administrator in 12 years. **Sossamon's** tenure depended on support from at least three of the five commissioners. And he had that support until last year, after a shift in control of the all-Republican board.

Commissioners Nick Nicholson, Steve Champion and Wayne Dukes formed a majority coalition that supported **Sossamon**. Then Nicholson was arrested in April on prostitution-related charges and suspended from office. Gov. Rick Scott replaced Nicholson in June with John Mitten, who sided with Commissioners John Allocco and Jeff Holcomb on a number of issues, including **Sossamon's** firing.

Over the years, commissioners have formed competing — and sometimes shifting — factions, whose votes have benefited businesses ranging from tourism development and land purchases to garbage hauling and airport operations. And business and political leaders have struck out behind the scenes at commissioners — and administrators — who don't behave as they wish.

In **Sossamon's** final moments on the job, members of the new majority criticized him for letting other commissioners run him in the past. There wasn't a single commissioner who didn't do that, **Sossamon** fired back. "I think I can safely say in front of God and everybody that the micromanaging potential and propensity of the boards I've had in this county has been greater than in any place I have served in 30 years, without a doubt," **Sossamon** said. "Nobody's shirt tails or cuffs of their britches are clean, bar none," he said. "I can say that unequivocally."

The way it was

For years, the commission majority supported **Sossamon**, and their supporters benefited. Dukes gave **Sossamon** perfect scores on his evaluations, and Nicholson's were largely positive. Both had connections to Tom Barnette, a local businessman who gave counsel and money to their campaigns. Barnette owns a travel agency and has ties to other enterprises that have done business with the county.

Barnette won a \$50,000 contract for his "Follow the Mermaid" marketing campaign, which the county bought in 2014, but never used. He arranged a consulting agreement in 2016 with a company chosen to run a multi-million dollar, waste-to-energy effort that the county later

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dropped. And he was a consultant to Republic Services, which in 2017 won a seven-year, no-bid contract with the county for garbage service.

Champion joined the majority coalition when he was elected in 2015. It was not so much that Champion was a Barnette man, but more that he wasn't a Kimbrough man. Champion said he ran to oppose what he called the good old boys in Brooksville, whom he blamed when SunTrust bank canceled accounts with his American Gun and Pawn business.

For years, the face of SunTrust in Hernando County has been bank executive Jim Kimbrough. The bank helped finance local business expansion, and Kimbrough worked behind the scenes to influence commissioners and administrators. As recently as last week's commission meeting, Champion said he was pleased to see SunTrust disappear from the local banking landscape after hearing about its recently-announced merger with BB&T.

The Champion-Dukes-Nicholson coalition was made clearer last year during the Hernando County Sheriff's Office investigation into charges against Nicholson. A witness close to Nicholson told investigators that she overheard Champion tell him that if Nicholson left the board, their three-person alliance would no longer be in charge. The three "are all on the same team together, and they can get whatever they want done, because they're the majority," the woman told detectives. Champion and Dukes cast the two lone votes against firing **Sossamon**.

The other camp

Commissioners Holcomb, Allocco and Mitten voted to fire **Sossamon**. Among the new majority's connections are ties to local Republican Party leaders and the Greater Hernando Chamber of Commerce. Holcomb leads the Hernando County Republican Party Executive Committee, a job he took over from Allocco, who took it over from state Rep. Blaise Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill). Until this year, Ingoglia was head of the state Republican Party.

Mitten chaired the Chamber's government affairs committee for years. And Chamber chairman Marilyn Pearson-Adams is head of Century 21 Alliance Realty, the same company at which Holcomb is a real estate agent.

Local Republican and business leaders have long said that **Sossamon** should not have been both county administrator and economic development director. Outwardly, they said that the economic development role was so important, there should be one person doing only that job. Anonymously, through pop-up social media sites, they criticized **Sossamon** specifically.

The idea of splitting the job surfaced again after Mitten joined the board last year and commissioners first discussed reopening **Sossamon**'s contract. The Chamber reminded commissioners of its concerns in an email sent to all commissioners on the day of **Sossamon**'s ouster. "... an individual dedicated solely to the mission of economic development is necessary to help achieve economic prosperity for businesses and residents of Hernando County," wrote Pat Crowley, chamber president.

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One of the biggest prizes for commission factions has been helping their business interests at the Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport. It came down to a power struggle between **Sossamon** and Gary Schraut, a real estate broker, who also works with Chamber chairman Pearson-Adams.

When **Sossamon** arrived in Hernando County, Schraut was chairman of the airport's Aviation Authority, a longstanding advisory board that the commission disbanded in 2014 after a series of controversies. On the day he was fired, **Sossamon** told commissioners this story: Shortly after he arrived, he said, Schraut asked him to sign some airport paperwork and reacted badly when **Sossamon** wanted to read it first. "The battleground of Hernando County is littered with people who tried to take me out," **Sossamon** said he was told by Schraut. "I thought to myself, I'm a southern boy, and I recognize a threat when I hear one."

Schraut told the Times this week that he never had that conversation with **Sossamon**, although he remembers telling him that he would be around long after **Sossamon** was gone. Schraut denied any power struggle over the airport — as Aviation Authority chairman, he said, the law was on his side. But he acknowledged that he and **Sossamon** were at odds.

**Sossamon** lied to him, Schraut said, and worked to secure business for Barnette. That's why Schraut said he helped to run a website called "Lenny the Liar" during the 2016 election season, blasting **Sossamon** and the commissioners who supported him. Schraut has been closely aligned with Kimbrough. In 2013, Kimbrough and Schraut were outed for holding secret meetings with commissioners about the airport, perpetuating the sense that the airport was a closed shop and only certain individuals got business there. Kimbrough publicly supported the Schraut-led Aviation Authority, and his bank funded economic development projects at the airport.

In 2016, Schraut supported Kimbrough and Cliff Manuel of Coastal Engineering, when they made a run at the county waste-to-energy contract — challenging the company connected to Barnette. Also during the run-up to the 2016 election, Ingoglia admitted this week, he was an investor in the now-defunct Florida News Flash, a blog that also posted negative stories about the commissioners who supported **Sossamon**. Ingoglia said he had no editorial control over the site, even though he was a site administrator.

Ingoglia said he does not discuss local politics with commissioners and has no alliance with Holcomb or Allocco. He said he did not think **Sossamon** was doing a good job but was not behind his ouster. "I thought he was a poor administrator," Ingoglia said. "He took on too much and played too many political games."

**Sossamon** told the Times last week that he tried to talk to all sides during his tenure, even Kimbrough and Schraut. That probably extended his longevity, he said. But he also was realistic. "You can please some of the people, but you can never please all of the people," **Sossamon** said. "Sooner or later, it comes back to bite you. And it did."

The new reality



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Holcomb had been in the minority coalition since he was elected to the commission in 2014. But his fortunes began rising last year as he became part of the new majority. In December, Holcomb was named head of the county Republican Party. Days later, he was nominated to be commission chairman — over vice-chairman John Allocco.

**Sossamon's** biggest cheerleader on the board, Dukes, blasted giving Holcomb the chairmanship. "He hasn't shown that he has a working relationship with our administrator," Dukes said. "Matter of fact, the rumor is that he'd like to fire him today." In fact, Holcomb gave **Sossamon** his most critical evaluations over the years and spoke out about his contract extension in 2016. Dukes was outvoted, however, and Holcomb took the gavel.

On Jan. 29, Holcomb — not known to spearhead issues at commission meetings — passed his gavel to Mitten so he could make a motion himself. Holcomb gave a detailed statement about why **Sossamon** needed to go and moved for his termination.

Dukes spoke out again. Dukes said he had missed a recent meeting of the local Republican Executive Committee. But he had heard that during the meeting, Ingoglia's father, Andrew Ingoglia, asked Holcomb when he was going to fire **Sossamon**. "Folks, there's something wrong with this," Dukes said. "It smells." Holcomb said he responded at the committee meeting that he had placed an item about **Sossamon's** contract on the upcoming commission agenda.

Blaise Ingoglia's legislative assistant, Ashley Hofecker — who is not a regular at commission meetings — sat through the meeting on Jan. 29, occasionally typing on her cell phone. The Times requested any government business-related texts received by commissioners that day on their county or private cell phones. They are public under the Florida Government in the Sunshine Law. Four commissioners responded immediately. Mitten produced a text from Manuel, saying that with **Sossamon** gone, they should talk about deputy administrator Jeff Rogers. Three others said they had no government-related text messages on their private phones. Holcomb didn't respond.

A week later, when called specifically about the texts, Holcomb said he had no government-related texts. "I had no marching orders from Blaise Ingoglia. He's too busy," Holcomb said. "People just want to have an enemy they can point to." Ingoglia said it was Hofecker's job to monitor local government, and that's why she was at the meeting.

At the Jan. 29 meeting, Allocco and Mitten shared Holcomb's concerns about **Sossamon**, citing budgeting errors and poor employee management decisions. Those problems have the county spending more than \$9 million more in its general fund this year than it is collecting in revenue. Allocco said this week that he arrived at his decision on **Sossamon** independently. But the question of who was responsible for the county's budget and personnel problems — **Sossamon** or the commissioners he worked for — remains.

Since the majority coalition of the commission flipped, Schraut has started to attend commission meetings again after being away for years. And a new airport advisory committee has formed.

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Two properties that Schraut represents, and stands to receive a commission from selling, secured county contracts at the same meeting in which **Sossamon** was fired. Manuel challenged a recent bid for airport engineering work after Coastal Engineering wasn't recommended by the county staff. The matter is slated for discussion at Tuesday's commission meeting.

Several days after his termination, **Sossamon** said he is proud of his business development accomplishments, the county's strategic plan and its master storm water plan. "My conscience is clear," **Sossamon** said. "I did a good job for the county." He hopes the "revolving door" of administrators doesn't happen again, saying it does not serve the county.

**Sossamon**, 68, said he is looking at several possible employment opportunities. He earned an annual salary and benefit package worth just over \$295,000 for his dual position and will receive a parting package worth \$76,089 in severance and \$61,386 in paid leave time.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
June 8, 2018

**COUNTY OFFICIAL'S SCORE DROPS**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

In the midst of Hernando County's budget shortfall, the county commission's evaluation score this year for county administrator **Len Sossamon** is the lowest since he arrived in 2012. However, as in past years, **Sossamon** has both fans and critics on the board. The multi-million-dollar shortfall is the definitive issue in ratings by commissioners Jeff Holcomb and John Allocco, who marked **Sossamon** "unsatisfactory" in financial management. Commission Chairman Steve Champion marked him "marginal, needs improvement," in that category.

Commissioner Wayne Dukes marked **Sossamon** as "excellent/proficient" in each of the 15 qualities measured, as he has in past years. **Sossamon's** average score this year was 4.2, with Dukes giving him a 5.0, the highest possible, and Holcomb giving the lowest score, 2.93. The five-point scale places **Sossamon's** average just above the category of "exceeding expectations" overall.

The rating system includes marks for everything from job knowledge and ethics to organizational skills and humor. Holcomb noted that **Sossamon's** "hiring of a budget director created a budget crisis for the 2019 budget." He gave **Sossamon** lower marks on communicating with the governing body, and being honest and fair. For Holcomb, the administrator exceeded expectations in only three areas: creativity, adaptability and resilience.

Allocco also graded **Sossamon** as needing improvement in honesty and fairness, and in planning. Allocco said he trusted the accuracy of budget information given out last year, his first year on the commission, and was not aware until recently of the budget problems. "I feel that **Len** was either unaware of the poor financial position ... or was unwilling to communicate this openly with the commissioners in the sunshine during last year's budget workshops and meetings," Allocco wrote. "I depend upon him to speak honestly during our meetings to make sure we all have the whole story, even at the risk of hurt feelings."

Allocco also suggested goals that **Sossamon** make hiring and firing decisions based on the needs of the county rather than lobbying from individual commissioners, and that he give commissioners "the whole story," especially about budget issues. Champion praised **Sossamon** for picking a strong deputy county administrator in Jeff Rogers as part of his succession plan, for his experience in leadership and his ability to forge compromises between commissioners.

But Champion also urged **Sossamon** to be sure that information he provides commissioners and the public is accurate. His goal for the administrator was for him to fix the budget without raising taxes and to find a compromise with the budgets of constitutional officers. Dukes' perfect score for **Sossamon** praised his "strong leadership ability" and "sound judgment decisions." For goals,

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he stated: "Continue to strive to help local businesses to expand, continue reaching out to bring new businesses to Hernando County."

**Sossamon**, whose pay and benefits total \$295,684, also is the county's economic development director. **Sossamon**, 67, came to the county in 2012 from North Carolina, making him one of the longest-serving Hernando County administrators in recent history. He did not do a self-evaluation this year, but said he understood the commissioners' concerns about the budget gap. **Sossamon** said he presented commissioners options that included reduced spending and raising revenue, but commissioners have held fast to not raising taxes. **Sossamon** said he was confident that county staff and commissioners will resolve this year's budget shortfall. The budget comes up for final approval in September.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
June 16, 2017

**SOSSAMON TO CONTINUE WITH DUAL ROLES**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

**Len Sossamon** will be keeping his dual jobs of county administrator and economic development director for at least a while longer. County commissioners this week rejected the idea of spending \$23,000 to conduct a nationwide search to find a new economic development director, which would allow **Sossamon** to focus on his administrator chores, and also opted to not spend \$25,500 on a similar search for a new deputy administrator.

While the need for more focus on economic development was a primary plank in the campaign platforms of County Commission candidates last year, the board couldn't muster enough support to bring in a full-time director at the present time. Concerns that the 2017-18 budget is still top-heavy with expenses, and disagreement about which of the potential new jobs might be needed and how **Sossamon** is performing in the dual roles, the commission opted for a cheaper alternative for now.

Commissioners voted to advertise the job of deputy administrator - a job that would replace several assistant administrator positions now held by department heads - but to do so only internally, taking applications from employees in departments controlled by the commission and as well as from those employed by the county's constitutional officers. The job posting is expected to go up immediately.

The cost of filling that job, clerical support and space and equipment is estimated at \$200,000. A small amount of that might be recovered if those in the current assistant administrator jobs take pay cuts, but that has not yet been determined, according to Cristi Charlow, the county's personnel and risk manager. Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes said he was concerned about spending money for nationwide searches, especially since the commission is in the middle of setting its budget for the 2017-18 fiscal year. "I don't want to be writing any checks I cannot cash," Dukes said.

Commissioner Nick Nicholson wanted to see how much **Sossamon's** load would be reduced with a deputy administrator added. He suggested the commission wait for several months after that person is on board to assess how things are going. "I think we have some talent internally" for the deputy administrator job, said Commissioner Steve Champion. He was also concerned about the cost of the search, which was to have been done by the same search firm that found **Sossamon** five years ago.

But Commissioner John Allocco strongly supported finding a new economic development director. He said **Sossamon's** annual evaluations have been largely positive over the last couple of years, indicating that he wasn't having trouble managing the administrator part of the job. "If these are accurate, then why does he need help?" Allocco said. The previous commission began

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the process of seeking a full-time economic development director before the new commission was seated in January, so "hiring an economic development director should not seem unreasonable" at this point, he said. Asking **Sossamon** to do two full-time jobs was doing him a disservice, said Commissioner John Mitten. He said he saw the decision to hire a new deputy administrator or a new economic development director as an "either-or" proposition, but also noted that the county needs to focus on economic development full time as the county grows.

Dukes reminded the board that a search a few years ago for a new economic development director didn't turn up a suitable candidate, so the board turned to **Sossamon**, who had economic development experience in his past jobs. Dukes praised his work and asked him if he is currently working with new business prospects.

**Sossamon** detailed a variety of upcoming meetings with potential new businesses, noting there are between 16 and 18 he is currently courting. Dukes and **Sossamon** have also encouraged the board to find a way to beef up the county's war chest of potential financial enticements for new businesses, a kitty that sits just below \$1 million currently. Other places have much bigger incentives to offer, they argue, including Pasco County, with a \$50 million fund available.

Champion said there is a financial benefit to both the economic development and deputy administrator positions. He took note of several controversial issues that are costing the county money and said he wants to see a deputy who is "like a bulldog, somebody in charge." He said he was concerned that there are special interests trying to influence the hiring of an economic development director and that names of potential candidates are already being circulated. "I don't like that," Champion said. Commissioners voted to move forward with the internal search for the deputy administrator, with Allocco casting the sole no vote.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
November 18, 2016

**COUNTY BOARD EXTENDS SOSSAMON'S CONTRACT**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

As one of their last official acts, the Hernando County Commission this week awarded **Len Sossamon** a four-year contract extension as county administrator and economic development director - much to the chagrin of government watchdogs and the two incoming commissioners. The unanimous action likely means **Sossamon** is safe in his current jobs until Commissioner Jeff Holcomb, who has been gone on military leave for the last several months, returns. It is unclear when that will happen.

Two sitting commissioners, Wayne Dukes and Nick Nicholson, strongly support **Sossamon**, while the two commissioners who will be sworn in Dec. 6, John Allocco and Steve Champion, have raised questions about **Sossamon's** future in one or both of those jobs. Without a fifth commissioner to break a tie vote, nothing can be done to change Tuesday's action.

Critics, including Allocco and Champion, urged the old commission to leave the decision up to the new board. But Dukes argued that, with 30 years of commission experience among them, members of the old board "are more qualified than anybody" to decide on **Sossamon's** performance and better suited than "the guys with no experience."

Nicholson sang **Sossamon's** praises, saying that the administrator has worked with every commissioner and has made government more efficient and responsive. He said none of the county's other recent administrators' performances "could hold a candle" to **Sossamon's**. He also took the opportunity to urge the new commissioners to represent the public in every decision and not the "special interests." Nicholson noted, "we don't need anyone who pulls our strings or is telling us how to vote." Nicholson said that, when he ran afoul of powerful community leaders, he was told to drop out of the commission race or he would see his family and his business destroyed.

"What we need is a School Board, a City Council and a County Commission in which all the representatives are voting their conscience and not based on what someone is telling them to do," he said, contending that **Sossamon** has brought in 10 times as many jobs to the community as his predecessor, who earned \$100,000 just for his economic development work. "Anyone who wants to do away with (**Sossamon's** economic development record) - I'm not so sure he should be sitting up here," Nicholson said.

**Sossamon**, who makes \$168,750 a year performing both jobs, was the target of much of the election rhetoric aimed at replacing Nicholson and Commissioner Diane Rowden. Nicholson won re-election; Rowden was defeated. The commission's action on Tuesday does not actually tie the commission to anything. The extension of the contract calls for the same salary provisions and includes the same ability to remove **Sossamon** from the job. He would have received the

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same 20-week severance package if his contract was not extended past its previous May 2017 end date, county legal staff told commissioners. The decision, argued county resident Pat Miketinac, "should be up to the new commission."

Chuck Greenwell, who heads the government affairs committee of Hernando Beach Property Owners Association, had another perspective. He praised **Sossamon's** work, saying he was "one of the hardest-working people I have had ever seen in government." He called **Sossamon** "the glue, the continuity that holds the commission together" and said the county would be hard-pressed to find any replacement who could do better.

Allocco, who has been critical of **Sossamon**, urged the administrator himself to stop the commissioners from moving ahead on his contract, but County Attorney Garth Collier explained that **Sossamon** had no authority to do so. Pulling an advertised item from the agenda required either the chairman or a vote of the majority of the commission, Collier explained.



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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
July 29, 2016

**ELECTION SEASON ONLINE ATTACKS TARGET SOSSAMON**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

During election season, incumbent candidates for public office expect to get blasted for their voting records and for pet issues. But in this year's Hernando County Commission races, some of the harshest attacks have been focused on County Administrator **Len Sossamon**, who doubles as the county's economic development director. The latest attack raised the hackles of commission Chairman Jim Adkins, who during this week's commission meeting complained about incorrect information circulating on social media. **Sossamon** read a memo he wrote to the commission, correcting the record on a particularly nasty attack on the Facebook page of Frank Rossetti, the CEO of a financial group that serves school district employees.

Rossetti, who was briefly a candidate for the School Board, posted an article about a Connecticut gun manufacturer that was trying to relocate and chose Texas over Hernando County. "I am sure that if we had the right people orchestrating this deal, it would be a win-win for everyone," Rossetti wrote. "There is no reason to lose companies like this to Texas or any other state for that matter, I mean if it's about jobs then let's bring jobs here."

Others chimed in, implying that getting such jobs might require bribing local officials. Local Realtor and political player Gary Schraut - who has long been critical of **Sossamon's** handling of airport and economic development issues - wrote: "We tried going after these companies 2 years ago. **Sossamon** screwed it all up." He stated that in order to land companies, **Sossamon's** "buddies" would all need to be paid.

Also jumping into the Facebook discussion was Jimmy Lodato, the Democrat hoping to win the District 1 seat on the commission. He is also a personal friend of the owners of the gun company. "Gary, I gave this to Mike McHugh (the previous economic development manager) and the commissioners never backed him up," Lodato wrote. "Alan Mossberg (an executive with the gun company) was my neighbor and my good friend in Tierra Verde. Three years ago, I asked Mike McHugh to contact my friend Iver Mossberg about moving here and he did, but the county never followed through after he left. Sadly, another missed opportunity."

Lodato's Facebook page is loaded with videos critical of the county's economic development efforts. "Some of the allegations in the Facebook stream are personal and are, in fact, totally untrue," **Sossamon** said. "I am accused of doing nothing to attempt to recruit, not only Mossberg, but other firearms manufacturers as well. The (County Commission) is accused of not backing ... McHugh. In general, our business/economic development efforts are critiqued as useless."

He said the county did follow up with the Mossberg family, but they never responded. In fact, **Sossamon** said, he wrote more than 360 letters to firearms manufacturers, and that began even before he officially became the county's economic development director. "We did not drop the

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ball on Mossberg or the others," **Sossamon** said. He noted that he wondered if the Facebook critics realized that the company moved its business to a subsidiary in Texas that has been in business for more than 25 years.

The Facebook commenters joining the criticism of the current commission include Jeff Holcomb, the county commissioner who is now on military leave. In the middle of a discussion about noon July 21, a commenter notes that the current commissioners need to be replaced - all but Holcomb. Holcomb responded at 3:35 p.m. that day: "Thank you gentlemen, if we get the right folks elected in November we can make some changes!" Commissioner Wayne Dukes said he appreciated that the county staff responded but noted that the people who are engaged in such discussions don't care about the facts. "It's personal attacks for personal gain," Dukes said.

When former planning commissioner and oft time County Commission critic Anthony Palmieri brought up recent accusations by a local conservative blogger that the commission and **Sossamon** were covering up for an airport business that was not meeting its contract obligations, Dukes said, "Consider the source." The blog, Florida News Flash, has been criticized by the commission before, with **Sossamon** calling out the accuracy of blogger Samuel Martin McCall and taking note of McCall's felony conviction for grand theft in Alabama.

Palmieri insisted that, if the company in question, Transformation Aviation Services, hasn't met a requirement to hire a certain number of people by this month's deadline, that information should be made public or it would seem like a coverup. County Attorney Garth Collier said that, if a company doesn't meet its contract requirements, there would be sanctions. As for whether those would be announced at a public meeting, he noted that the county is trying to attract business to Hernando, not turn it away. At the last commission meeting, Transformation Aviation Services owner David Tidwell, said publicly that his contract obligations for hiring employees had been met.

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Tampa Bay Times: Web Edition Articles (FL)  
March 31, 2016

**Hernando Administrator receives good evaluations from all but one commissioner**  
Author: Barbara Behrendt

BROOKSVILLE — Because of a mediocre score from the newest county commissioner, Jeff Holcomb, County Administrator **Len Sossamon** saw the average score drop in his annual evaluation for the first time this year. **Sossamon** will celebrate his fourth anniversary as administrator next month, a rare feat in a job that has long been like a rapidly revolving door. Commissioners evaluate administrators annually in 15 categories, ranging from resilience and adaptability to organizational skills and ethics. The scoring scale ranges from a 1, which indicates an unsatisfactory performance in a category, to a 5 which indicates excellence and proficiency.

In evaluations released late last month, **Sossamon** earned an average of 4.49 compared to last year's average of 4.64. Two commissioners, Wayne Dukes and Diane Rowden, gave **Sossamon** perfect scores of all 5s. Rowden praised **Sossamon** saying that his "organizational skills and motivational skills are incredible" and that he "has improved so many areas and continues to improve. He is always several steps ahead of the curve."

In November, Rowden raised the issue of highlighting the good work that **Sossamon** has done when he was wearing his other hat as the head of economic development for Hernando County. Rumors have been flying that **Sossamon** has a target on his back and that the upcoming November election could turn the tide for **Sossamon's** future. Among the powerful business leaders who **Sossamon** has crossed is Realtor Gary Schraut, who strongly opposed the County Commission's move to abolish the county's aviation authority on which Schraut had served for years. He has posted negative public comments on his Facebook page about **Sossamon** and his abilities. Dukes also expressed support for **Sossamon** at the meeting last year, as did Commissioner Nick Nicholson. Nicholson, who gave **Sossamon** a score of 4.93, and Rowden are both up for re-election this year.

On his evaluation, Nicholson said that the administrator "reorganizes positions to best use each person's strengths" and that he is "not afraid to change people around if he needs to." As a goal he has for **Sossamon**, Nicholson wrote "keep delegating but also follow up to see if people are doing their job and following the board's direction and his." Commission Chairman Jim Adkins, who is not seeking re-election, gave **Sossamon** a 4.53. He praised the administrator for his economic development efforts and credited him with creating jobs. "Keep working to get more good businesses in the county," he wrote. Holcomb did not write any comments about **Sossamon's** performance, but he gave him an average score of 3 which means "meets expectations." In the detail of the ratings, he marked **Sossamon's** "financial management" at a 2, which is "marginal, needs improvement," and his "job knowledge" as a 4 or "exceeds expectations." **Sossamon** signed all of the evaluations except for Holcomb's.

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**LEONARD B. SOSSAMON**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
November 6, 2015

**COMMISSIONERS BACK SOSSAMON**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

At a meeting late last month, the county's economic development supervisor, Valerie Pianta, touted new projects that have brought in hundreds of jobs and filled several vacant industrial sites. People need to pay attention, said County Commissioner Diane Rowden, because the rumor mill has been churning with stories that Pianta's boss, County Administrator **Len Sossamon**, has a target on his back. "To me, it's very disheartening to hear the rumblings of a concerted effort to get rid of Mr. **Sossamon**," Rowden said. "People need to recognize what's being done with Hernando County and the airport...with millions of dollars we've received through grants."

**Sossamon**, who also serves as the county's economic development director, added that in the last two months, Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport has received more than \$2 million in grants for projects including the replacement of antiquated lighting, a new instrument landing system and replacing signs. More grant funds are expected soon to replace hangars. Rowden said she had heard some people in the community complain that **Sossamon** has accomplished nothing, but "they need to look at the numbers."

Commissioner Wayne Dukes also praised the economic development efforts, as did commission Chairman Nick Nicholson, who said of **Sossamon**, "I think he's doing a great job." Commissioner Jim Adkins spoke about the need to fast track more speculative buildings so the county will be ready to offer locations as businesses considered a move or expansion. One place where **Sossamon's** activities have been questioned is on the Facebook page of politically influential Realtor Gary Schraut. He has had a prickly relationship with **Sossamon** over airport issues since Schraut's chairmanship of the Aviation Authority, which the commission abolished last year. On his Facebook page, Schraut paints **Sossamon**, Dukes, Nicholson and Rowden all with the brush of tax-and-spend Democrats. Only Rowden is a Democrat. Schraut also complained about the void of county business successes. "We have an administrator/economic development director along with a trio of commissioners who just keep trying to buy their way into a successful business by wasting tax payers \$'s! All these tax payer \$'s are be wasted so they can claim they are business friendly...more like business inept," he wrote on the site Oct. 19.

Schraut also railed against **Sossamon's** bankruptcy in a private-sector venture several years ago. "Very little successful private sector experience on the BOCC. They abolished the Aviation Authority so we would not stand in the way of County Administrator 'Mr Bankruptcy' **Len Sossamon**," he wrote Oct. 19. "Yes, he had one serious venture outside of government and filed bankruptcy without his 50/50 partners consent!!! But he sure has pulled the wool over this community with the help of the BOCC, they know all about it!!" Schraut said he has since softened his feelings toward **Sossamon** because he believes he is only trying to please three members of his board. But he also said he strongly believes the job of county administrator needs

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to be separate from the job of economic development director. And he has little good to say about **Sossamon** in either role. **Sossamon** said people need only look at his record to know he is doing his job. "The proof is in the pudding," he said.

That includes the projects Pianta presented at the meeting. Her report touted seven projects in the last year adding or absorbing 230,000 square feet, creating 230 new jobs and retaining 101 jobs. Also announced was a new company that has moved into and is fixing up the old Christian Contractors building on U.S. 41, according to Pianta. That 170,000-square-foot building will soon house Regency Technologies/Florida Metals Processing, a metal recycler. The company plans to hire 70 people. Pianta promised more good things ahead as the county is working with 14 other companies.

**Sossamon**, in a later interview, also talked about improvements in other county departments. "Apparently, somewhere along the way, I stepped on someone's toes," he said. Then, **Sossamon** remembered when he first came to Hernando County 3 1/2 years ago, he suspected within the first 48 hours he would meet the person who would ultimately be his undoing. "If I get fired, I'll do something else," he said. He said some people in the county's power structure want him out because he uses his experience to make his decisions. "I don't like to be handled," **Sossamon** said. "I know how to run a county."

Nicholson said he stands behind **Sossamon** and that he is the best administrator the county has had in recent memory. He said **Sossamon** has put good people in leadership positions, increased employee morale, gotten union contracts settled quickly, sped up permitting and demolished unsafe buildings. "The fact is that people are telling me to get rid of **Leonard** because he is in their way," Nicholson said. "They need to get three votes on the County Commission, and they don't have that now. It's just that simple."

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
June 5, 2015

**COMMISSION GIVES ADMINISTRATOR HIGH MARKS**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

The more the Hernando County Commission knows their administrator **Len Sossamon**, the more they seem to like him. As he hits his third anniversary in the job - a rare feat in the many years of high turnover in the county's top job - **Sossamon** has earned the highest marks he has received since arriving in Brooksville. The average score he earned when graded by the five commissioners late last month was 4.64 out of a possible five points. That's up from last year's 4.43 and his first year's score of 4.09. A 4 represents that **Sossamon** "exceeds expectations" while a 5 is excellent/proficient.

Two of the commissioners, Wayne Dukes and Diane Rowden, gave **Sossamon** 5's in all 15 categories, from planning and organization to honesty and creativity. His lowest score came from Jim Adkins who gave him all 4's. Dukes told him to "keep up the good work" and listed his strengths as providing strong leadership and being a team builder. Rowden gave him credit for "phenomenal" organizational and managerial skills and noted "his whole approach is proactive that goes hand in hand with his vision where Hernando County needs to be in 10-20 years." She also suggested that the county needs a more defined business development plan. "We need to pay Mr. **Sossamon** a significant increase for doing two jobs with excellent performance," she said.

**Sossamon**, who is also the county's economic development director, receives an annual salary of \$168,750. Commission Chairman Nick Nicholson praised **Sossamon** for his problem solving and gave him a goal to fix the county's fleet and maintenance department. Adkins noted **Sossamon** "works very hard to expand economy in Hernando and expanding the workforce."

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Tampa Bay Times: Web Edition Articles (FL)  
December 25, 2014

**Heading into 2015, Hernando administrator has a lot of prospects, projects on his plate**

Author: *Barbara Behrendt*

BROOKSVILLE — For **Len Sossamon**, the pace each day is a sprint. That's because **Sossamon** is wearing two very demanding hats — one as county administrator and the other as Hernando's economic development director. When he takes a breather to think about what's in store for the county in 2015, as he did recently with the Times, it is no surprise that he has not just one, but two lengthy lists of tasks. **Sossamon's** first list reflects his favorite duties. "Recruit jobs. Recruit jobs. Recruit jobs," he said, noting that he and the county's economic development supervisor, Valerie Pianta, are currently working with 20 to 24 active prospects for new or expanding businesses, in addition to following up on leads from a number of organizations.

On the list of active prospects is a craft beer manufacturer. But **Sossamon** knows that the company is weighing its options, and Hernando County's competition is Asheville, N.C., a community that has some features going for it that Hernando doesn't. One of those is a technical school that offers a certification and degree program for brewing craft beer. That is why **Sossamon** is always exploring ways to make the incentive packages for businesses interested in Hernando County as attractive as possible. Other types of businesses on the active prospect list include high-technology companies and various research and development shops, as well as manufacturers of such products as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and prosthetics. "We've made them proposals, and they just have to say yes," **Sossamon** said.

In addition to traditional economic development activities, he is continuing to look for a tourism venue for Hernando County. As the county has worked through finding a home for the proposed Nature Coast Education and Tourism Center, all eyes have been on that project to fulfill the need. It might, **Sossamon** said. But there might be something else in the works, as well. The County Commission has settled on a site in the Weekiwachee Preserve for the education center, but is awaiting input from the Southwest Florida Water Management District, which owns the site, before starting the design work. **Sossamon** said he hopes to get an extension from the state for spending the \$3 million in state dollars that will help fund the project, which he anticipates could be completed within 18 months. Other ideas for the tourism venue are also in discussion, including working toward some traditional ecotourism options, as well some more active rather than passive types of tourist activities. Another possibility is the development of a sports complex.

In the new year, the county will continue to participate in the multicounty German manufacturing apprenticeship program that is set to be headquartered at Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport and Technology Center. That could be open by March, **Sossamon** said, and classes for adults could begin by May or June, and by the start of the school year for younger students. Work also continues with the school district and airport interests on developing an aviation academy. Micro Matic USA, which makes beer-dispensing equipment, has broken

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ground on its new 73,000-square-foot home, visible from the Suncoast Parkway. A ribbon could be cut for that facility by late June. **Sossamon** said multiple county departments have come together to make that project happen as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Another major push in 2015 will be to finalize the list of projects the county hopes to have funded through the Restore Act, which is the oil spill settlement fund from BP. The county has a list of projects, but has also solicited ideas from outside groups and individuals.

Development of a snorkel trail along a portion of the Hernando County coast might be one of the projects. Another possibility is identifying the worst infestations of invasive plants along the coast and starting to get them under control. As part of that discussion, **Sossamon** said, he also would like to update the county's ordinance on Brazilian peppers to include other plant invaders. "It's on the coast. It protects the environment. It's enhancing the environment," **Sossamon** said. Those are among the criteria that projects must meet to qualify for Restore Act funds.

Other top projects on the list for the coming year include taking a look at the companies ranked by county commissioners that provide nonlandfill alternatives for getting rid of solid waste, storm water-control projects and the continuation of lime rock road paving projects. **Sossamon** said he is looking forward to continuing the effort to diversify the county's tax base and to the impact that the opening of the new Cortez Commons shopping center and other new commercial buildings will have on the local economy in the coming months. "2014 was a good year," he said, "but I think 2015 will be even better."



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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
November 16, 2014

**AIRPORT LEASE DISPUTE LANDS IN COURT**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

For several months last year, controversy swirled around the efforts of a Clearwater-based airplane maintenance company to move to Brooksville-Tampa Bay Regional Airport and expand its operation. The debate sparked a power struggle between Hernando County Administrator **Len Sossamon**, and the leadership of the airport and the Hernando County Aviation Authority. The divisive issues ranged from the financial capabilities of the company, Corporate Jet Solutions, to a debate over whether the county was responsible for repairing its flawed building and site as a condition of the lease that the company ultimately signed in July 2013.

At the time, county officials agreed to fix some of the problems at the site, which previously had been known as the Brooksville Air Center. But since Corporate Jet Solutions owner Tony Dye and his father, Bradley, moved in, a host of new problems have arisen. Last week, the ongoing dispute about who is responsible for fixing what led the Dyes to seek an injunction in Circuit Court to prevent eviction from the site. A day later, the county filed paperwork in court seeking to evict the company. On Friday, Circuit Judge Donald Scaglione denied the injunction sought by Corporate Jet Solutions and canceled a hearing scheduled on the issue, making it possible for the company to make its arguments about the county's responsibilities for the flawed facilities through the county's eviction lawsuit.

The paper trail of legal action reveals that Corporate Jet Solutions officials have discovered several serious problems with their site, including substandard wiring, buildings not grounded to minimize danger from lightning, a fuel tank that doesn't measure up to the county's airport standards and a hangar with a smaller entry door than the one described in the county's advertisement seeking someone to lease the site. The wiring and grounding problems were discovered in October when a lightning strike immobilized the company's electric gate, telephone system and other electronics. "Defendant Hernando County performed the inspection necessary to obtain certificates of occupancy for the FBO (fixed-base operator) and the hangar," according to the Corporate Jet Solutions filing. "Therefore, defendant Hernando County knew or should have known about the faulty cabling, poor grounding and other latent defects at the property." The filing states that the county "willingly and knowingly permitted unlicensed, uninsured or unqualified lay persons to perform construction and electrical work," and the result created conditions that Corporate Jet Solutions officials were not aware of at the time they signed the lease.

On Oct. 7, County Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes visited Corporate Jet Solutions, and, according to court papers, Bradley Dye believed that Dukes intended for the more than \$30,000 it will cost the county to replace the undersized fuel tank to be deducted from the company's lease payments. "As to the damages of the lightning strike, the estimate cost to repair the county's telephone system and other service equipment and to correct the defective grounding

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exceeds an additional \$30,000," according to the court papers. The representative of Corporate Jet Solutions also notes that, "as a showing of good faith and to refute any allegations that this petition for injunctive relief is being used as a tactic to delay the payment of rent," the company has put \$32,864.16 in escrow.

In an email written to his son and a representative of his lawyer, Bradley Dye characterizes his meeting with Dukes by saying, "I am convinced that Mr. Dukes was truly sincere and was frustrated to find that these problems have lingered since our leases were signed in July 2013. Mr. Dukes assured me that all of these issues would be completed by Nov. 4, 2014. ... "He was appreciative that the matters were handled away from the media, as I told him that going public would only hurt us both." In the county's eviction complaint, deputy County Attorney Jon Jouben notes that Corporate Jet Solutions has not paid its rent since the beginning of August. Earlier this month, airport manager Kevin Daugherty put the company on notice that it owed \$32,864.16 for its leases, and to pay up or face eviction. Corporate Jet Solutions officials met last week with county officials to try to work out a compromise but several hours later filed paperwork seeking the injunction.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
June 11, 2014

**SIDE JOB EARNS HIGH MARKS FOR SOSSAMON**

Author: TIMES STAFF

Hernando County commissioners like what they see in their county administrator/economic development director, **Len Sossamon**. On Tuesday, Commissioner Diane Rowden reminded her colleagues that six months have passed since **Sossamon** took on economic development as a side job, and that it was time to negotiate a permanent agreement if commissioners were satisfied with his performance. Commissioners agreed to allow the county attorney to negotiate an agreement to examine at a future meeting. "I think our administrator is doing a very good job," Commissioner Nick Nicholson said. Though six months perhaps didn't seem like a long time for a full assessment, Nicholson said, "in a very short time, we've seen some good results."

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
May 30, 2014

**HERNANDO LEADER SCORES HIGH MARKS**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

For the second straight year, Hernando County Administrator **Len Sossamon** has earned high scores from county commissioners, including two perfect evaluations. Hired in May 2012, **Sossamon's** overall score this year was 4.428 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 meaning "excellent/proficient." That is up from last year's score of 4.09.

Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes and Commissioner Diane Rowden, who don't always agree on issues, gave **Sossamon** 5's in each of 15 categories, ranging from planning and organizing to humor and ethics. Dukes praised **Sossamon** for thinking outside the box, being a good communicator and stepping up to take on more responsibilities. In addition to serving as administrator, **Sossamon** agreed several months ago to take on the role of economic development director.

For **Sossamon's** goals in the year ahead, Dukes wrote "fast track" of projects. "The county administrator has brought back consistency in government," Rowden wrote. "He respects the county employees as the backbone of the organization and values their input. The administrator has gained the employees' respect through his management style. "Mr. **Sossamon** is such a breath of fresh air for Hernando County's administrator position." Rowden suggested that **Sossamon** continue to delegate more work to his four assistant administrators so he can spend more time on economic development.

Commissioner Dave Russell noted that **Sossamon's** involvement in community functions was a good reflection on the county and he wrote that the administrator has "strong visioning for enhancing quality of life initiatives." **Sossamon's** lowest score came from Commissioner Jim Adkins, who gave him only one 5 - for "communication with the governing body." **Sossamon**, 63, who came to Hernando from North Carolina, did not complete a self-evaluation.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
March 5, 2014

**HERNANDO ADMINISTRATOR ACCEPTED FREE GAME TICKET**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

On Jan. 8, Hernando County Administrator **Len Sossamon** joined three local University of Florida supporters in Gainesville to watch the school's basketball team take on **Sossamon's** favorite squad, the University of South Carolina Gamecocks. The Gators won. One of their most prominent local fans, SunTrust Bank executive Jim Kimbrough, picked up the tab for **Sossamon's** \$20 general admission ticket.

On Tuesday, after questions were raised about the game, **Sossamon** told the Times that he had invited Kimbrough to his office so he could repay him for the ticket. "In about an hour I'm going to insult Mr. Kimbrough and give him a check for \$20," **Sossamon** said. He also planned to tell Kimbrough that he couldn't travel out of the county with him again, but he would be free to meet with him in his office. A dozen years ago, another county administrator - Paul McIntosh - was pushed out of his job after it was revealed that he accepted sports tickets from local business leaders and a round of golf at the exclusive Black Diamond golf course in Citrus County from Kimbrough.

While the cost of the ticket **Sossamon** accepted doesn't meet the \$25 "minimal value" outlined in the county's gift policy, the news of the trip to Gainesville still riled up one commissioner. Commissioner Nick Nicholson said he didn't care whether **Sossamon** repaid Kimbrough for the ticket or not. "It's a concern of mine," Nicholson said. "I would just prefer for him not to do these kinds of things." Nicholson said that **Sossamon** should meet Kimbrough only in his office and that trips and long lunches send a bad message because **Sossamon** "is with people who are trying to influence his decision making."

In the past, Nicholson has voiced concerns about Kimbrough, who is influential in local politics, meeting individually with commissioners. "Mr. Kimbrough has come to my office before and left not happy, to say the least," Nicholson said. Nicholson said he planned to talk to **Sossamon** about the perception of influence and to remind him that he answers to commissioners. "The five of us are his boss," he said. **Sossamon** said he was invited to the game because he is a Gamecock fan. He said he went in an effort to mend fences between the government and business leaders. "It was all in good spirit to make amends with the business community," he said.

Also along on the trip were Cliff Manuel, president of Coastal Engineering, and local lawyer Bruce Snow, who is a past county attorney. During the ride with Manuel and Snow, **Sossamon** said they talked about sports, Hernando County history and who is related to whom. **Sossamon** also acknowledged a discussion about barbecue, a topic near to his heart. The three met Kimbrough in Ocala and then traveled to Gainesville for the game. They each bought themselves water, peanuts and popcorn. **Sossamon** also got Gator pompoms, which still sit in his office.

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"Nobody bought them for me," he said, and no county business was discussed. Other than that trip, he acknowledged only one other out-of-the-county trip with Kimbrough. The other was to Dade City, where they met with Billy Brown of the Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative to talk about the utility's industrial land adjacent to the Brooksville Walmart distribution center. That conversation happened before the County Commission gave **Sossamon** the additional duties of being the county's economic development director.

County Commissioner Diane Rowden, who also has been critical in the past of private meetings between Kimbrough and county commissioners, didn't see a problem with the basketball tickets, especially since **Sossamon** paid back the cost. "I have full confidence and trust in Mr. **Sossamon**, and if he said he didn't discuss county business, I have no reason to doubt that," she said. "He didn't violate any policy by going to a basketball game."

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
December 11, 2013

**HERNANDO LEADER TAKES ON EXTRA ROLE**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

When Hernando County lost its business development manager to the private sector in August, county commissioners embarked on a nationwide search to find a replacement with a proven track record. They found that person Tuesday, and he had been sitting in the room with them all along. Commissioners on Tuesday agreed to allow County Administrator **Len Sossamon** to take on the role of economic development director in addition to his job of running the county, at least on a trial basis.

When **Sossamon** was hired, part of the appeal, commissioners said at the time, was his experience as both administrator and economic development point person in his old job in Concord, N.C. Among his accomplishments there was developing the city's airport and industrial areas. After a national search to replace Michael McHugh, 31 applicants were narrowed to just two to be interviewed in person. The interviewers - including **Sossamon**, his staff, commissioners and local business leaders - decided neither one was the right fit. On Tuesday, **Sossamon** asked what to do next.

Commissioner Wayne Dukes suggested hiring a professional recruiter, which is how the commission found **Sossamon** nearly two years ago. But Commissioner Jim Adkins suggested that **Sossamon** be tapped for the job because he had done it before, even if just temporarily. In his current job, he has already been involved in some economic development activities, he said. Commissioner Nick Nicholson said he had been talking to **Sossamon** about the possibility for months. "He's got the track record," he said. "I'm in agreement," said Chairman Dave Russell, as long as **Sossamon** didn't find that he was "spreading himself too thin."

**Sossamon** thanked the board and members of the public who spoke up in favor of the idea. He said he was happy to take on the challenge and would let commissioners know if he was in over his head. The choice takes the county in a different direction, one that puts the administrator in a more active business recruitment role. In recent months, there has been a tug of war between the county's airport and the administrator's office for control of the airport's industrial components. A proposal for how the new job will work will be negotiated between **Sossamon** and Russell and be brought back to a future meeting.

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Tampa Bay Times (FL)  
May 15, 2013

**COMMISSION LIKES WHAT IT SEES IN SOSSAMON**

Author: BARBARA BEHRENDT

For his one-year anniversary as Hernando County administrator, **Len Sossamon** received the gift of a positive evaluation from county commissioners. His evaluation earned him a numeric score of 4.09 out of a possible 5 and none of the commissioners scored his qualities as below the standard of "meets expectations" in any category. The ranking is slightly higher than he gave himself in his self-evaluation, which averaged out to 4.07. **Sossamon** said that he felt good about the review by commissioners and that he was already making their suggested improvements. He earned his lowest score from Commissioner Nick Nicholson, who was also most detailed in his comments about work **Sossamon** needs to do. "Employee evaluations have not been done for years," Nicholson wrote. "After a year on the job, I would have hoped that you knew about this without me bring(ing) it to your attention."

That's the same criticism Nicholson leveled at **Sossamon** during a recent commission meeting. Since that time, **Sossamon** has met with his assistant administrators and supervisors have been told that they must have their evaluations up to date by the end of May. Those who don't will be reprimanded, he said. Nicholson also jabbed at the county utilities department, saying that it needs to be reorganized and that there are too many supervisors. **Sossamon** said that he has already talked about this to Brian Malmberg, assistant administrator for operations, and that Malmberg is looking into it. Nicholson also urged **Sossamon** to get a new fleet manager on board and the administrator said he is working on that as well. As a weakness, Nicholson wrote that **Sossamon** "needs to know when county policies are not followed. Can improve by having people reporting to him telling him what is going on."

**Sossamon's** recent reorganization, which narrowed his core managers to four assistant administrators, is accomplishing that goal, **Sossamon** said. Not all of Nicholson's comments on the administrator were negative. He noted that **Sossamon** worked hard, finished tasks, listened well to his commissioners and was always accessible. Commission Chairman Dave Russell urged **Sossamon** to implement his strategic plan and **Sossamon** said he will soon be bringing that before the commission, possibly as early as the end of the month. Russell also noted that **Sossamon** "has done well in his efforts to boost morale in his management team and county employees. His community outreach program has struck a positive chord with the public as well."

"**Len** hit the ground running," wrote Commission Wayne Dukes. "His experience in the private sector in addition to his government work experience has already shown to be beneficial to his role as county administrator." Commissioner Jim Adkins wrote that he wants **Sossamon** to keep working on economic development and he noted that the administrator has a "good management style. Very good keeping me well advised." **Sossamon's** highest marks came from Commissioner Diane Rowden. She noted that his "communications skills are excellent." In his



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self-evaluation, **Sossamon** listed what he perceived as his accomplishments in his first year. The were "restructuring the county's operations, reorganizing Animal Services, dealing with last spring's "monsoon season," dealing with issues of trust with the citizens and the press." His goals for the upcoming year are to get his strategic plan approved and put in place, to soon receive oil spill money though the Restore Act to benefit Hernando County and to continue to restructure government to make it more efficient. **Sossamon** also sought help from commissioners, asking them to be "precise in directives," and to help him "anticipate problems or areas of concern that I am not hear(ing) about. This way we can be more proactive and less reactive."

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Hernando Today (Brooksville, FL)  
November 15, 2012

**Sossamon gets 1st review**

Author: Michael D. Bates

"A model of efficiency." "Leading the charge to improve citizens' perception of government." "Handles employee challenges professionally and fairly." "A refreshing, take-charge attitude." These were some of the remarks from county commissioners when they evaluated their new county administrator after his first six months on the job. Only these were from 2008, and the administrator was David Hamilton.

Hamilton was fired about 3 1/2 years later after commissioners criticized his professional judgment, blamed him for a severe drop in employee morale and questioned his role in promoting directors. "I do not have any confidence left in this administrator to lead this organization," Commissioner Jeff Stabins said in a November 2011 meeting. Fast forward to November 2012 and the first performance evaluation of County Administrator **Leonard Sossamon**. In his first six months on the job, commissioners gave **Sossamon** a sterling evaluation, receiving an overall 3.93 average out of a maximum 5. That puts **Sossamon** well within the "excellent-proficient" category.

Among other things, **Sossamon** was evaluated on such things as decision-making, initiative, customer service, dependability and leadership. Like his predecessor, **Sossamon** is still in the "honeymoon period" and commissioners are expecting the best. But this time, they hope **Sossamon** breaks the routine of rapidly departing administrators and erases the stigma that Hernando County cannot keep an administrator around long enough to stabilize the organization. Incoming commissioner Diane Rowden, criticized during her previous tenure on the board and in the just-concluded political campaign for her style of micromanagement, said she will maintain a "hands-off" policy toward **Sossamon** and allow him to do his job.

New commissioner Nick Nicholson, though, believes there has been too little oversight of county administrators in the past and intends to keep a close eye on **Sossamon** to make sure he is monitoring department heads and weeding out the bad ones. Nicholson said he doesn't put much stock in **Sossamon's** six-month evaluation because he hasn't been there long enough to learn the ins and outs of the community or government or familiarize himself with employees. "It's too much to learn (in six months)," he said. Nicholson said **Sossamon** should have had enough time on the job to start implementing some of his initiatives instead of doing things "off the cuff."

Commissioner Jim Adkins said the next six months will be more telling for **Sossamon** as he starts from the beginning the crafting of a new fiscal year budget and deals with the reorganization of the county utility department. From hereon, evaluations will likely be tougher, especially as **Sossamon** is expected to get a major chunk of his much-awaited long-term strategic plan for Hernando County completed. Adkins said **Sossamon** is inheriting a different atmosphere from Hamilton, who almost from the start was forced to cut directors, trim employees and

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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streamline government. That led to ill will for many in the system, he said. Adkins said he intends to continue talking to **Sossamon** about issues but not to the point of micromanaging. "I don't ever want to do that," he said.

County Commissioner Dave Russell said he has great hopes for his administrator. He describes **Sossamon** as "extremely congenial, and it's meant a lot to the folks who work under him." Hamilton was criticized as time went on for his lack of "people skills" and a decline in morale. "I don't want to compare the two," Russell said. "They're two different people. **Sossamon** was hired in May and faced a tumultuous budgetary session. He was immediately faced with a breakdown of management in animal services. A tropical storm caused huge residential and commercial damage and destroyed much of the Peck Sink stormwater project.

In his performance self-evaluation, **Sossamon** said he has worked to manage many of those problems. "I have worked to find new revenue sources to help bring the budget into better control," **Sossamon** wrote. He lists as his accomplishments the reorganization of stormwater management, animal services and code enforcement. His objectives include developing a "smoother and better process for the annual budget" and to finish the county's strategic plan. As chairman of the county commission, Wayne Dukes said he probably interacts the most with the administrator. "I'm impressed by what I see," Dukes said. "He's bringing a lot of new ideas and setting good standards for the workers." Dukes added someone would have to work hard to receive a poor six-month evaluation. "If you screw up your first six months, you better be looking for a bus trip home," he said.

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Hernando Today (Brooksville, FL)  
May 20, 2012

**Inside Leonard Sossamon**

Author: Michael D. Bates

**Leonard Sossamon** spent the past week moving from North Carolina to his new home in Hernando County.

On Monday, he will settle into his second-floor office and become Hernando County's newest county administrator, and the public will see him in action during his first commission meeting Tuesday.

Will **Sossamon** be the man who bucks the trend and stays in the job more than a few years?

County commissioners hope so, and **Sossamon** says he has every intention of doing so.

Hernando Today talked to the 61-year-old North Carolinian this week to learn what he will do when he starts his duties.

Here is part of that interview:

Q: What will your first week on the job look like?

A: I will start meeting with staff, talking with (interim County Administrator) Ron Pianta, (budget manager George Zoettlein) and others to go over the budget, where we are, because that's something that needs immediate attention. I want to find out where we are, what we have tried. Let's see if I can come up with some new ideas or twists on old ideas. Then, obviously, I will be talking with the commissioners and different department heads. It's going to be a busy week.

Q: There is a perceived high level of dissatisfaction toward county government officials. What will you do to reduce the level of negativity in the community?

A: I want to see exactly where the origin of those feelings are, to see if they are valid or not and, if it is, see what we can do to change those attitudes. If there are problems, let's try to find a solution to them and build a bridge to re-establish that trust. Residents must know their problems are going to be heard. The (county administrator) needs to re-establish that foundation with not only the public but also with the staff. As the lead person, I will be the person most of the time that people will expect to carry the ball and go a long way in terms of establishing trust with the public.

Q: Hernando County has not had a good track record of retaining administrators. How do you plan to reverse that trend?

A: Hopefully, I'm going to be the first person who can reverse that trend. I believe in doing the best job possible, being compassionate with concerns and trying to find the way to solve

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problems that exist and lead by example by being out front. I don't look at this as a stepping stone. I don't even think about retiring, I really don't. I like to stay active and busy. As long as the commissioners, the public, are happy and I'm happy, why not stay? I look forward to being here on (Monday), and I hope everyone has good expectations. That meeting the second day will obviously be interesting and exciting.

Q: How long will it take you to get up to speed on Florida law?

A: There are some similarities between Florida and North Carolina. The Florida (Government-in-the-Sunshine Law) is probably more rigid, more strict, and I'm sure the county attorney, Garth Collier, will keep me straight on that, so I will count on him.

Q: The community was incensed by the same-day euthanizing of an 8-month-old pit bull at animal services. The county clerk's office is doing an audit of the department. Have you been following this issue?

A: I guess the hot-button issue is animal services. I have been following it. I haven't had a chance to talk in detail (with staff), but I've read the newspaper articles and watched part of a meeting where it was discussed. I want to sit down when the audit is completed and find out what happened.

Q: How will you work with the media?

A: I will try and be as open as possible and as responsive as possible. I think the public should be informed, and I think the media coverage (in Hernando County) is good.

Q: Do you plan to be visible in the community? What is your impression of Hernando County, based on your recent visit?

A: I do get out and about. I like to exercise. I am more of a people person, (and) everybody appears to be very friendly.

Q: Explain your management style. Should there be a clear-cut chain of command?

A: I like to have my door open and talk with people, public and staff. Obviously there is a chain of command, but (I) like to help staff solve problems, and if they need help, give me a holler. Why have department heads if you do not let them do their jobs?

\* \* \* \* \*

**Sossamon's** wife, Esther, will stay in North Carolina for about a year until she wraps up her job there and retires. Until then, he will be living in Hernando County alone. "It won't be the easiest thing," he said. "But she has vacation time built up over the years, so we'll have long weekends and holidays, and I'm looking forward to that."

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Hernando Today (Brooksville, FL)  
April 10, 2012

**Sossamon tabbed as new Hernando County administrator**

Author: Michael D. Bates

**Leonard Sossamon** said he can't wait to hit the ground running as county administrator of Hernando County. The weather is gorgeous, the people seem nice and he believes he will get along well with commissioners and government employees. With a 5-0 vote of support from his bosses under his belt, **Sossamon** said he expects to work out contract details and start work within 30-60 days. "I really do appreciate the vote of confidence from the Hernando County board of commissioners and I look forward to working with them, as well as the citizens and the Hernando County staff," **Sossamon** said. **Sossamon**, 61, was one of three finalists recommended by the consulting firm of Baenziger & Associates. Heading into Tuesday's vote, he was also the favorite, as reported in Hernando Today over the weekend.

Commissioners said **Sossamon's** successful track record in diversifying industry while administrator in Newberry was impressive and hoped he would do the same in Hernando County, which has seen the construction industry tank. Four out of five commissioners chose **Sossamon** via straw poll before Tuesday's formal selection. Commissioner Dave Russell, who chose none of the three finalists, changed his mind and threw his support behind **Sossamon** in a spirit of cooperation. "I was just looking for a little bit more," Russell said after the meeting. But Russell said **Sossamon** was the strongest of the three and doesn't want him to think he doesn't have his full support going into the job. "I think it's important he recognize I'm behind him 100 percent," Russell said. "I want him to be successful."

Russell said he is impressed by **Sossamon's** experience and demeanor. "I want him to spend the next couple years proving I was dead wrong in not supporting him from the get-go," Russell said. "We look forward to a new direction in Hernando County," Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes said. **Sossamon** has two years' experience as a county administrator in Newberry, S.C. and 13 years as city manager in Concord, N.C. **Sossamon** said his first priority will be tackling the 2013 budget. He was in town last week when county commissioners learned in a workshop they were staring at a \$9.5 million shortfall.

**Sossamon** said economic development and jobs creation will be high on his radar when he starts. He plans to bolster the manufacturing sector and target medical-technical jobs. He said he would examine where budget cuts can be made without sacrificing resident services. He was pleased the county has developed a new tourism marketing plan, designed to maximize bed tax dollars and target certain travelers. **Sossamon** is married and has no children. Born in the South, he has not been a frequent visitor to Florida but knows the warm weather will be right up his alley. "I'd rather have it 95 degrees than 35," he jokes.

**Sossamon** will replace former administrator David Hamilton, who was fired last November after the board said it lost confidence in his ability to manage. They also criticized Hamilton's people

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skills which they believe led to low morale in the government center. Hamilton's tenure lasted three-and-a-half years, longer than anyone in that position since Chuck Hetrick, who had served from 1984-97. **Sossamon** will be the county's ninth administrator since Hetrick left.

On his resume, **Sossamon** states he has been co-founder and owner of Cabernet Holdings since 2006 to the present. He also lists himself as CEO and executive vice president of Alliance Development Group LLC in Charlotte, N.C. Cabernet Holdings in Concord N.C., filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in April 2010 to head off foreclosure proceedings against him and his partner, who owned the Holiday Inn Express in Lexington. But commissioners chalked up the bankruptcy to the economy and did not sway their votes.

The other two finalists for the position were Ed Green, who spent the last 14 years as county manager for Garfield County, Colo.; and James Wilson, who served as the equivalent to a county administrator for nine years in Galveston, Texas and was also director of housing and community development. The job was advertised at \$120,000-\$160,000. Hamilton made \$134,999 annually. Land Services Director Ron Pianta will remain as interim administrator until **Sossamon** takes the reins.

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Hernando Today (Brooksville, FL)  
April 7, 2012

**Finalist has money woes**

Author: Michael D. Bates

At least two county commissioners said they are leaning toward **Leonard Sossamon** as their choice to take over the top managerial job in Hernando County. **Sossamon**, 61, was one of three finalists for the county administrator's position. Whether that support will evaporate with the knowledge that **Sossamon** was involved in a bankruptcy two years ago will be determined Tuesday, when commissioners are slated to pick their next manager. As of Friday, the support still seems to be there and they chalked up **Sossamon's** failed business venture to a bad economy.

Hernando Today has learned that **Sossamon's** company, Cabernet Holdings in Concord, N.C., filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in April 2010 to head off foreclosure proceedings against him and his partner, who owned the Holiday Inn Express in Lexington, N.C. Cabernet Holdings is a limited liability company in Lexington owned by **Sossamon** and Dan Boone, each as a 50-50-member-manager of the LLC. The paperwork was filed in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court, Middle District of North Carolina.

According to paperwork, NewBridge Bank in January 2010 started foreclosure proceedings against the company, which it said owed the bank some \$6.6 million. On his resume, **Sossamon** states he has been co-founder and owner of Cabernet Holdings since 2006 to the present. He also lists himself as CEO and executive vice president of Alliance Development Group LLC in Charlotte, N.C. In July 2010, a foreclosure auction was held at the Holiday Inn and another hotel chain won with a \$5.6 million bid. **Sossamon**, contacted Friday, said his firm developed the Holiday Inn Express for a group of investors who, at the last minute, did not close on the deal and that left Cabernet holding the bag. He said there was no option but to file for Chapter 11 corporate bankruptcy.

County Commissioner John Druzbeck said **Sossamon** likely didn't disclose the bankruptcy episode for the same reason former administrator David Hamilton would probably not disclose his involvement with the controversial Hernando Beach channel dredging project. Hamilton was roundly criticized for his management of that much-delayed project. "You're going to find something in everyone's past that may be questionable, if you want to call it that," Druzbeck said.

Druzbeck said bankruptcies are occurring everywhere given the economy. "It was a business investment that obviously did not do well," Druzbeck said of **Sossamon's** failed venture. In addition to his private sector background, **Sossamon** was county administrator of Newberry, S.C. from 2004-06. He was also city manager of Concord from 1985-98. **Sossamon** was one of three people who made the short list of Baenziger & Associates, hired by county commissioners for about \$21,000 to conduct a nationwide search for the county administrator position. In the interview notes conducted by Baenziger's staff, the bankruptcy is not mentioned. [CB&A Note:



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*To correct this article, the bankruptcy was disclosed in Mr. Sossamon's materials.] Nor did it come up during this week's public interview session held by county commissioners.'*

Currently, with his privately owned entities, **Sossamon** is making \$145,000, his profile said. When he was employed with the city of Newberry, he made \$107,000. Druzbeck said **Sossamon** is "the better fit" for Hernando County than the other two candidates.

Newberry, where he served as county administrator, is demographically similar to Hernando County and he has faced many of the same financial challenges the local board is facing. "I think what Mr. **Sossamon** offers is something closer to what Hernando County needs and has been striving for," Druzbeck said. When the textile industry soured in Newberry, **Sossamon** strove to diversify the county's industry to revive a dying tax base, he said. Druzbeck is also impressed with **Sossamon's** efforts in North Carolina to help establish manufacturing parks, an airport and nurturing private-public partnerships. "I just think he brings more to the table for Hernando County than the other two candidates," he said.

\* \* \* \* \*

County Commissioner Jim Adkins said he too is leaning toward **Sossamon**, especially after this week's one-on-one meetings with all three candidates and the public interviews. Adkins said he was impressed with **Sossamon's** efforts to revitalize his county's economy. Hernando County, he said, is trying to do the same thing by reducing its reliance on the building industry. **Sossamon** seems to have a good vision for Hernando County. Adkins said he asked all three candidates if there were anything in their backgrounds that would embarrass the county and all three denied any skeletons. Adkins said he did not know about **Sossamon's** company bankruptcy but didn't think it was serious enough to raise issues.

These days, bankruptcies are not uncommon and as long as there is nothing criminally related, there shouldn't be a problem, Adkins said. However, the county human resources department will conduct a background check, he said. **Sossamon**, according to the interviewer with Baenziger & Associates, believes in "straightforward and honest communication. "He has created a positive atmosphere in the community by being transparent with all forms of media," the interviewer wrote. "He has nothing personally controversial in his background, nor has he done anything that would be potentially embarrassing to a future employer." When told of the bankruptcy filing, County Commissioner Dave Russell said it is "something we'll need to look at, obviously." Russell said he had not narrowed down his preference for the manager's position. All three seem to have the experience for the job, he said.

County Commission Chairman Wayne Dukes said he was aware of **Sossamon's** bankruptcy filing but doesn't believe it should be an issue. Dukes said **Sossamon** assured him there were no pending problems in his professional life that would be detrimental to doing the job here. But Dukes said he is keeping an open mind about all three candidates.

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The Dispatch  
April 26, 2010

**Hotel at winery files for bankruptcy**

Author: Vikki B. Hodges

<http://www.the-dispatch.com/section/TOPIC0301/>The owners of the Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites at the Vineyard have filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection to stave off a foreclosure on the property. <http://www.the-dispatch.com/section/TOPIC0301/>Cabernet Holdings, owned by Concord developers **Leonard Sossamon** and Dan Boone, filed for a Chapter 11 reorganization April 1, the last day of the upset period for the foreclosure sale, said William Miller of High Point law firm Roberson, Haworth & Reese. Miller was recently appointed receiver by the judge handling the bankruptcy case.

The foreclosure process was begun in January by NewBridge Bank, which claims it is owed approximately \$6.6 million in loans. Miller said he has retained the hotel's management company, Myrtle Beach, S.C.-based Strand Management, to continue managing the property as the bankruptcy proceedings are completed. "It's business as usual," said Therese Henderson, general manager at hotel, the newest in Lexington. "In fact, we were basically sold out last week." She said customers last week included people attending the High Point Market, a group from the N.C. District Attorneys Association, business people from Matcor, a metal fabricator in Welcome that is adding staff, and Home Trust Bank, the new owners of Industrial Federal, who are also planning some training at the hotel's conference room facility.

Henderson said business has been up since September 2009, with the first four months of this year up substantially from the same period last year. She said the occupancy rate has been between 60 and 70 percent of late, and bookings are looking good for the remainder of the year. "It's not for a lack of business," Henderson said of Cabernet Holdings' financial difficulties. She said the company's problems stem back to July 2008 when Cabernet Holdings was set to sell the hotel it built to a buyer who backed out of the deal. Cabernet Holdings had only intended to develop the hotel, not manage it. When the sale fell through in the middle of the recession, the company decided to hire a management company to run it for them. "They inherited all the debt, then the economy crashed," she said. "It just wasn't a good time to open a hotel, but they didn't want it to sit empty."

After gaining a 30-day extension from an April 13 bankruptcy court hearing, Henderson said the owners plan to present a reorganization plan May 18 in court. She said the extension will allow them to pull together all the paperwork they need to show they can continue to operate the hotel and pay off the debt. Miller said the hearing May 18 will also address a couple of motions filed by NewBridge. The bank has filed for a dismissal of the Chapter 11 filing by Cabernet Holdings and has also filed a motion to allow it to proceed with the foreclosure sale, even if the Chapter 11 filing stands.

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The four-story, 88-room hotel, nestled between Childress Vineyards winery and The Shoppes at Vineyards Crossing, has had a history of false starts. First the hotel was set to open and be built to the specifications of the Best Western chain. Then the hotel changed to a Hampton Inn and finally to Holiday Inn, one of the sponsors of Richard Childress Racing. In between those hotel franchise changes, the ownership also changed a couple of times, with Cabernet Holdings taking ownership in July 2008.

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Independent Tribune (Concord, NC)  
March 20, 2008

**Graffiti or urban art?: Definition of what's art, what's not inspires debate**

Author: *Eric C. Deines; Independent Tribune, Concord, N.C.*

Mar. 20--CONCORD -- Through the ages, artists have pushed the definition of art and left critics to argue its merits. Has that argument now hit downtown Concord? Downtown property owner **Leonard Sossamon** may agree it has. At a Concord City Council meeting last week, **Sossamon** addressed the council concerning some graffiti -- or "urban art" -- that has appeared at the rear of his property at 11 Union St. South. The "urban art," as **Sossamon** referred to it at the meeting, features a spray-painted skateboarder, as well as some profanity and other markings. In a letter from the city, **Sossamon** was asked to remove the art within a given amount of days before a \$100-a-day penalty was enacted. Concord's Chief of Police Merl Hamilton said the city keeps graffiti in check by applying its signage ordinance. If graffiti appears, Hamilton said, it's treated in the same manner as a sign that is out of compliance with the city code. "It's pop art," **Sossamon** said. "It's not a sign, because I'm not advertising anything." Hamilton said the city has policies that look to rid buildings of graffiti because it's seen as a stimulus for greater crimes. "It's a disorder issue, which often leads to crime," Hamilton said, comparing graffiti to a broken window.

If a broken window were left as such, Hamilton said, it may eventually lead to other broken windows on that same building. Then, vagrants may find it easy to enter the building, which could lead to several other crimes, such as drug abuse. Hamilton said a downtown area covered in graffiti may give the idea that downtown is an appropriate place to engage in criminal behavior. And gang-related graffiti, Hamilton said, already has its direct link to criminal activity. He said that graffiti is often reported by residents, code enforcement officers or city employees. **Sossamon**, who in 2007 completed a \$2 million renovation of downtown's old Paramount building, said he knows several instances where graffiti art has been as accepted as true art. **Sossamon** also said he has considered commissioning such an artist to paint a mural on one of his buildings.

The letter that came to **Sossamon** from the city referred to the wrong city ordinance, which was actually found to only read "reserved," **Sossamon** said. **Sossamon** also addressed this matter as one of his concerns when speaking to Council. City Council agreed to waive any fine for the graffiti while a further study is conducted. "I don't know what I was in violation of, and I still don't," said **Sossamon**, a former Concord city manager. Hamilton said business owners are often given a seven-day period to remove the graffiti before a penalty is enacted, though the city will work with owners to give them more time when necessary. At the City Council meeting, **Sossamon** also named some other locations around downtown where he found graffiti, including some city-owned properties. City Manager Brian Hiatt said the city-owned locations included in **Sossamon**'s list were cleaned this week. Hiatt said that the city generally tries to have its building maintenance crews clean graffiti from city buildings within 48 hours.

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Newberry Observer, The (SC)  
June 26, 2006

**County looking for leadership**  
**Administrator resigns-again**  
Author: Cindy Pitts

A search is underway for a new county administrator. County Administrator **Leonard Sossamon** told County Council on Wednesday night that he would not be returning after a six month leave of absence. **Sossamon** resigned earlier this year due to his aging parents' health problems. He was later asked by council to take six months' leave and return in July.

On Wednesday night **Sossamon** told council that things with his parents had not improved, and he would not be returning. Council Chairman Mike Hawkins said working with **Sossamon** over the past two years has been a "fun ride" and he hopes **Sossamon** can help the county with future projects. **Sossamon** came to work for the county in January of 2004. Councilman Henry Summer will chair a committee assigned with hiring a new administrator.

After **Sossamon's** first resignation, Gene Klugh was hired as acting administrator and will remain in that position until a new administrator is named. Hawkins said the process could take six months but adds that Newberry County has lot to offer potential candidates.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
March 12, 2006

**IN PATIENT PURSUIT OF PROGRESS**  
**RENOVATION OF THE OLD PARAMOUNT THEATER SHOWS HOW IT'S**  
**GETTING DONE - SHOP BY SHOP**

Author: VICTORIA CHERRIE

Buzz saws whir inside the old Paramount Theater, where the bottom floor is being refurbished for new stores and the upstairs is being readied for more retail and apartments. "We're rockin' and rollin'," said Dewayne Jordan, who is redeveloping the old building with former Concord city manager **Leonard Sossamon** and his wife, Esther. After years of planning and talking about how to rebuild downtown Concord, new businesses and projects are emerging. Some involve new construction and have residential components - a key to breathing new life into the city's core, city planner say.

An estimated \$20 million will be invested by the end of 2006, with more projects in the works, they said. "Downtown redevelopment is something you have to peck away at day to day," said Zac Moretz, former president of the Concord Downtown Development Corp., a nonprofit organization that promotes downtown growth. "There is progress here. It's just happening owner by owner, shop by shop."

Years of effort

Downtown Concord began to empty out back in the 1970s with construction of The Carolina Mall - the first major shopping center in Concord. Though a number of businesses remained and have thrived, city leaders and others have spent years trying to refill empty storefronts. Those efforts have paid off, especially in the past year. The Natural Harvest Food Store and Open Door General Store will be on the lower level of the old theater building, along with Bugs, a gift shop and salon that is expanding from its spot next door.

Jordan Brown Properties also is restoring the second-floor area, including the dramatic Italian plasterwork and old theater space. Once complete, it will be used as a ballroom for catered events. But it could revert back to a theater in the future, said Jim Fulton, with Lorenz Architecture. Jordan said he already has four people who want to rent the apartments on the third floor. Those are expected to be complete in the next six months, he said.

A number of buildings are being refurbished for use as offices or other commercial ventures. A 90-room independent living center called The Oaks at Stephens Place is being developed on Cabarrus Avenue through a partnership with the city. The city is selling the property to developers who plan to break ground as soon as the deal is signed in the next month, said Steve Osborne, the city's deputy director of business and neighborhood services. "It's about people being willing to invest," Moretz said.

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Mary Margaret Drye, 26, is one of them. The Concord native opened Mae Mae's, an upscale boutique with clients from across the region, about a year and a half ago. "I think it's important to put your money where your family is, where your roots are," Drye said.

#### City's strengths, challenges

Planners say downtown Concord's strengths include a residential historic district with large tree canopies and well-manicured streetscapes. The preserved historic courthouse and memorial gardens also are a plus. But there are challenges. Not only is downtown competing with nearby Concord Mills mall, a large retail outlet and the state's top tourist attraction, parking is becoming more of a problem. And Concord is much smaller than other cities such as Greensboro and Winston-Salem, which means there are fewer opportunities for growth, Osborne said.

This is one reason each redevelopment project is so important and in some ways connected to the next, he said. It's also part of the reason some of the more complicated and large-scale projects have not yet developed, he said. There's been much talk about what to do with the Old Concord Hotel, a historic building with a complicated structure and a group of owners. A couple of years ago, developers discussed redeveloping the hotel with the Heilig Myers Furniture building and nearby properties, including a parking lot, owned by First Charter Bank. That idea is still floating around, Osborne said.

Discussions also are underway over what to do with the six-story brick building at the corner of Union Street and Means Avenue. The county agreed last August to sell the building to Allen Craven LLC for \$1.4 million. But negotiations were extended so the company can work out a deal with Wachovia, which has three leases with the building that tie up all the parking and limits its use for banking. Those issues have stalled progress with the property, which is prime for residential development, officials said. "If you look at it in the big picture, sure, (redeveloping downtown) can be frustrating," Moretz said. "But if you look at it building by building, that's a little easier. There's a lot of momentum here."

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Newberry Observer, The (SC)  
March 6, 2006

**County dumps government change idea**

Author: · *Cindy Pitts Staff Writer*

An idea to change the form of county government was checked at the door when county leaders voted to drop the issue last week. Council had been considering putting a question on the November ballots asking the citizens if they wanted to change the local form of government from administrator to county manager. The change would have allowed the council to appoint the auditor and treasurer instead of them being elected.

There are four forms of county government in the state, explained Councilman John Caldwell. The county manager form is the one least used in the state with only three counties using it and there will be only two counties using it in 2007. Those two counties are Greenwood and York. "This is the most ridiculous thing I have heard in the last 25 years! It is totally out of line," said Caldwell. "This is totally out of line to even consider with all the success we have had with this form of government." "I don't believe it would get 10 votes in the entire county," said council chair Mike Hawkins. "We are taking away the rights of the people by removing elected officials. The council does good to run what we are running now," said Councilman John David Dawkins. "How did this get started?" asked Caldwell. "People are stopping to ask us what we have done wrong to get this put on the ballot," said County Auditor Nancy Owen.

Councilman Bill Waldrop said the idea was formed in a work session with concerns over the County Administrator **Leonard Sossamon** and the council not getting information from the treasurer's office. "We are not pointing fingers but have concerns over information being correct and what is our bottom line on money we have to spend," said Waldrop, adding there have also been problems with the treasurer's and county administration's computer systems aligning properly.

Treasurer Judy Floyd told the council that she has never failed to give them information when they asked for it. She added she can give them the balances "to the penny" on the 42 bank accounts that the county has and only information on county revenues. "I can give you the revenue balances at anytime," she claimed. However, Floyd said she can not give information about expenditures and expected expenditures because those functions are handled by the county administration office and she is not privy to them. "I only have so much information," she added.

Owen interrogated each of the councilmen one at a time asking them if she had done anything wrong in her office. They all responded that she had done no wrong. Owen told the council the way she and Floyd manage their departments helps to determine the credit rating for the county and state. "It is most important that I serve the citizens. The trust I have built did not happen overnight. How dare you consider taking this away from the citizens! No one believes in the power of the people more than I," said Owen, as she gave examples of many of her family



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members' experiences during war times. "Nothing is more important or humbling than serving the public. Being auditor is one of the greatest blessings in my life."

Councilman Andy Morris said another reason for discussing a change in government was that Floyd and Owen were expected to retire at the end of the term in June of 2009. Both women said they are a long way from deciding if they will run for another term. "I am less than one year into a four-year term. If I am running again or not is more than I can find in my magic ball. But I plan on running as long as my health holds out. I have as much passion in my soul as I had when I first started 39 years ago. I may run until I am 95," stated Owen.

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Newberry Observer, The (SC)  
January 13, 2006

**County hires interim skipper**  
**Sossamon offered six-month leave, chance to return**  
Author: · Holly Astwood

County employees gave a round of applause Wednesday night after hearing an offer to the county administrator to return in six months. County council voted to offer **Leonard Sossamon** a six month leave of absence from his job overseeing county operations and to have former interim administrator Gene Klugh again step into the gap. **Sossamon** gave council his notice of resignation last week during an emotional exchange, citing his parents' health as the reason.

It has been two years since **Sossamon** came on board in January 2004 and at the time Klugh had been filling in after the retirement of Gary Smoak. Klugh has over 30 years of experience in local government, beginning as a county manager in Edgefield County in 1967. He served in administrative capacities in Fairfield, Florence, Greenwood and York counties between the years of 1970 and 1993.

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Newberry Observer, The (SC)  
January 6, 2006

**County administrator resigns-surprised council to search**

Author: · Cindy Pitts

Through a flow of tears, County Administrator **Leonard Sossamon** announced Wednesday night that he was resigning his duties with the county. The announcement, which was initially made in executive session, came as a shock to the county council. **Sossamon** stated he was leaving so that he could help care for his elderly parents, whose health is declining. "I admire your decision. It shows the great relationship you have with your family," said Councilman John Caldwell.

Councilman Andy Morris said **Sossamon** was the right person at the right time when he was hired in January of 2004. "We will be thanking you 10 years from now for your service to Newberry County and the things you have accomplished," said Councilman Henry Summer. Council Chairman Mike Hawkins said working with **Sossamon** over the past two years has been a "fun ride." "If you told him to do something you better mean it because he began to work on it that night or first thing the next morning. I appreciate the job he has done," said Hawkins, adding the resignation came as a surprise. "I will miss you. You put in a lot of hours for the county," said Councilman Bill Waldrop. "I hate to see you go," echoed Councilman Edgar Baker. **Sossamon** will work through the end of January and Hawkins said the county plans to continue to use **Sossamon** on some projects.

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Bond Buyer, The (USA)  
December 28, 2005

**Special Source Refunding Saves South Carolina Nursing Home**

Author: Tedra DeSue

Faced with the possibility of losing a key nursing home facility in its community, Newberry County, S.C., officials sold about \$11.5 million of debt earlier in April in an unprecedented transaction that earned a Southeast honorable mention in The Bond Buyer's Deal of the Year Awards. The relatively small debt sale was recognized partly because it involved the issuance of special source refunding revenue bonds, which have never been sold for a nursing home in South Carolina. Proceeds were used to refinance several relatively high-interest loans - for a considerable amount of savings - that had previously been taken out for J.F. Hawkins Nursing Home.

Since the transaction closed, one other deal using a similar structure has sold, showing that the innovative structure can be duplicated, which is one of the factors The Bond Buyer's editors and bureau chiefs consider when judging deals for the awards. Newberry County sold the bonds, with Merchant Capital as underwriter and Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd bond counsel. Radian Asset Assurance Inc. insured the deal. A subsequent \$11 million county issue for Newberry County Memorial Hospital was completed this summer. The nursing home deal was structured with fixed rate, tax-exempt revenue bonds going out 25 years. More than half of the total - \$6.6 million - were term bonds that mature in 2021, 2025, and 2030.

Since 1965, the county has sold general obligation bonds to help the facility with its expansion and growth efforts. However, during the late 1990s, the nursing home's operations began to struggle and the facilities were teetering on bankruptcy, said Newberry County Administrator **Leonard Sossamon**. J.F. Hawkins' facilities include an Alzheimer's unit and a retirement community. To help them regain their financial footing, Newberry took the unprecedented step in 2002 to acquire the facilities and incorporate them as an enterprise fund. To do so, the county had to introduce an enterprise fund saddled with five privately placed loans with rates as high as 7.75%. That resulted in debt service coverage levels from 2000 and 2001 of 0.22 times and 0.97 times, respectively.

To improve coverage levels and generate some savings, county officials called on Merchant Capital and worked closely with banker Brent Robertson. The solution, they determined, was to issue the special-source refunding bonds. They were able to achieve a new rate of 4.81%, with a debt service savings of \$300,000 a year. The deal ended up with underlying ratings of Baa2 from Moody's Investors Service and BBB-plus from Standard & Poor's. Those ratings are another reason officials take pride in the transaction, as it allowed them to convert what would have otherwise been treated as non-investment grade nursing home paper into a revenue bond of the county.

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In addition, structuring the deal that way allowed for it to not be counted against the county's state-imposed debt limit. In South Carolina, a municipality cannot issue general obligation debt that exceeds 8% of its assessed property value without getting voter approval. This has often tied the hands of issuers, especially school districts that face growth-funding needs. Several of them have gotten around the limits by issuing installment purchase revenue bonds through nonprofit corporations. However, there was some public outcry that the structure was illegal, with critics charging that those bonds in fact amounted to school district debt and therefore should be considered as part of the debt limit statute.

For this deal, **Sossamon** said, there were no legal challenges. Also, several public hearings were held, and the transaction received support from the community. "We were able to do a marvelous job in freeing up capital and improving cash flow to help these facilities," **Sossamon** said. "People realized that this was a good bang for public dollars."

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State, The (Columbia, SC)  
October 1, 2005

**JAIL-WORKER PROGRAM UNDER MICROSCOPE**

Author: ADAM BEAM

Newberry County is reconsidering using inmates for work details after a trusty escaped Wednesday night and is charged in the death of a Florida woman. James Daniel Turner, 33, was a state Department of Corrections inmate assigned to Newberry County, Sheriff James Lee Foster said. Foster said he supports contracting with an outside agency to do the work inmates do for the county, but he's not sure the taxpayers would support it. He estimates it saves about \$250,000 a year.

County Council chairman Mike Hawkins said council would discuss the matter at its Wednesday meeting. He said there won't be any immediate changes to the policy and questioned whether changing the inmate policy was necessary. "Not only does it help us not have to employ people to do this task, but it's good for the inmates not to just be sitting in a cell," Hawkins said. "It would be so expensive if we had a law officer at every site where they are working. When you get to that point, it probably would be just as cheap to contract out what they are doing."

Newberry County administrator **Leonard Sossamon**, said County Council has informally discussed inmate labor for years. Now, he said, council members will take a hard look at the policy, but wouldn't give a deadline for a decision. Newberry County has 30 inmates out of 150 who are classified to be inmate workers. Out of those 30, 17 are Department of Corrections inmates. Turner was classified as a 1B inmate, which means he was a low-risk inmate without direct supervision. Newberry requested Turner because he could paint and do carpentry, Foster said. Turner worked at the Sheriff's Department, painting, cutting the grass, washing cars and cleaning carpets. He wasn't directly supervised, but was checked on periodically by someone while he was working.

Foster said Turner met Department of Corrections requirements for inmate workers and Newberry County's requirements for inmate workers, which factor in the severity of the crime, whether the victim wants the offender in the area and periodic drug testing. Lexington County had a trusty escape Aug. 27, but found him a few hours later behind a Waffle House. Maj. John Allard said inmate trusties are always a risk to escape and the Sheriff's Department follows the same standard set by the state Department of Corrections.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
January 2, 2003

**COUNTY MANAGER'S JOB ENTICES APPLICANTS**  
**LEONARD SOSSAMON ASKS ABOUT POST**  
**CLIFTON DEPUTY AND OTHERS FROM THE AREA COULD APPLY**  
**A MAJORITY OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WANT TO FILL THE POSITION**  
**WITH SOMEONE FROM CABARRUS**

Author: RONNIE GLASSBERG

Local residents are starting to line up for the Cabarrus County manager's job. Former Concord City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** has called county commissioners to express interest, several commissioners said. Interim County Manager John Day is another possible local candidate, although Day said he hasn't decided yet whether to apply. Two or three other qualified county residents also are interested, said commissioner Bob Carruth. Carruth declined to name them.

A majority of the board wants to hire someone from within Cabarrus to be the new county manager. "I think we're going to be looking right here in our own county," said commissioner Richard Suggs. The commissioners plan to talk about the search at a retreat Monday and Tuesday at Cabarrus County Governmental Center. The commissioners voted unanimously Dec. 2 to fire Frank Clifton after seven years as county manager. Clifton's last day was Tuesday.

Clifton said last week he was still looking for a job. In an e-mail to a city and county managers' mailing list, Clifton wrote that he wants to stay in North Carolina. He also praised Day, one of his two deputy managers, in the e-mail. Blair Bennett, the other deputy, is retiring Feb. 1. Day has worked for the county for more than a decade. "(Day) should do well and be the first considered for the position on a full-time basis," Clifton wrote. Day is filling in while the commissioners search for Clifton's successor, a process that's expected to take about six months. He said he's not yet sure he wants the job. "Ask me in a month," Day said, when asked whether he would apply. "We'll see how it goes." Day will be taking the helm during a tough period for the county. The county this year faces a budget shortfall of roughly \$9 million to \$10 million; making that up would require an 8- or 9-cent property-tax increase or an equal amount in program cuts. But the commissioners want to avoid a property-tax increase.

Once Bennett retires, Day won't have any deputy managers; Clifton had two. "I expect to not have a lot of free time," Day said. The commissioners said they don't want someone to fill in as acting deputy manager. "I think he's got some very talented department heads," said commissioner Carolyn Carpenter. "I think they should not have any problem at all." Carpenter and others said Day and **Sossamon** would bring the experience needed for the job. **Sossamon**, who works for developer Hunter & Brown Inc., would offer the private-sector experience that some commissioners want. Attempts to reach **Sossamon** this week were unsuccessful. He served as Concord city manager for 13 years and resigned in April 1998 to enter the real-estate development business.

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In 2000, **Sossamon** was appointed to serve in the General Assembly for about six months after former state Rep. Richard Moore resigned. He ran for the state representative seat but lost in that November's election to Linda Johnson. Johnson, R-Cabarrus, was re-elected this fall. **Sossamon**, a Democrat, would be applying to work for an all-Republican board. The commissioners said that won't be a consideration. "I don't even know the political affiliation of Frank Clifton," said commissioner Coy Privette.



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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
November 14, 2002

**DOWNTOWN'S PACKING MORE AND MORE SIZZLE**  
**NEW TAVERN IS HOPING TO PUMP ADDED VITALITY INTO THE CENTER CITY**  
Author: JAIME LEVY

Friday's opening of the George Washington Bookstore & Tavern marks what could be a defining moment for downtown Concord. With the tavern opening its doors to high-profile nightlife - and the recent or coming debut of several other restaurants on Union Street, Concord's main strip - the city is on the brink of a downtown revival. It's been coming for a while. Three years ago, the Union Street Bistro set up shop at 48 Union St. S., bringing upscale and dinnertime dining downtown. In the past year, more downtown buildings have been bought and sold than in the previous five years combined. The city in March unveiled a master plan that pictured a lively downtown complete with good lighting, a grocery store, a bookstore, and plenty of restaurants.

Now, a lot of simmering developments are starting to boil. The Barry Patch - a sandwich and pizza shop across the street from the Cabarrus County Courthouse - opened a week ago. A European-style delicatessen and wine shop called Montmartre is slated to open next month. A group of developers are discussing restoring a movie theater that once existed in what is now known as the Mini-Mall. "We've got some momentum going," said Connie Kincaid, director of the Concord Downtown Development Corp. "Downtown is becoming more and more a dining and entertainment district. Especially with the opening of the George Washington, you see that's really the direction in which we're moving."

Many niches at once

Part restaurant, part bar, part music hall and part bookstore, the George Washington - housed in a restored 102-year-old building - will try to fill many niches at once. "I've been in Concord since 1978. When I got here, I was a little shocked there was really nothing to do outside of creating your own entertainment," said Laine Harling, the former city councilman who owns the tavern. "I think downtown is the heart of a community. We have a beautiful historic district. It's got character. "The community is thriving now with people looking for something to do without driving to Charlotte or the University area," he said. "Something they can put their hands on." The tavern has a stage, an in-house drum set and a musician's lounge, and Harling hopes it will help put Concord on the music map. He's booked performers each weekend through the end of the year (see Entertainment Calendar, Page 9K). "We're creating our own music scene," Harling said. "This is going to be, we hope, a venue for regional, and eventually national, acts."

Old and new together

By salvaging antique pieces of wood, marble and other items from around the county, Harling has put together a venue that he hopes will successfully combine old and new: the same double identity that all of "Classic Concord," the brand name for the city's historic district, is trying on.

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For example, developers at Hunter & Brown bought the Mini-Mall at 9 Union St. N. within the last year. Built in the early 1920s as the Paramount Theater, the building is now empty.

"We like historical buildings," said **Leonard Sossamon**, a partner with Hunter & Brown. "We felt like maybe the time was right for something of that nature. A number of cities are trying to create downtowns. We're not trying to recreate it - we're just trying to preserve it."

#### More people downtown

Other area business owners say they are pleased to see more activity coming to the area - that, at this point, the market is far from being saturated. "The more people you have come to the area, the more exposure you have," said Raymond Hvasta, co-owner of the Union Street Bistro. "If they're coming downtown to go to the George Washington, chances are they'll pass by our place. The businesses can just feed off each other." Richard Barry, owner of The Barry Patch, agreed. "It's bringing more people to my end of town," he said. "I'm hoping to get them away from the malls and to our area of town for shopping."

#### Growing confidence

More new retail, however, is necessary to improve the viability of downtown Concord as a destination, Hvasta said. "I think we need better retail to get a nice mix of retail and restaurants," he said. "If you put 20 restaurants down here, nobody's going to make any money." As of now, Union Street is lined with several antique shops and a handful of specialty stores, including an equestrian gear shop and a sewing and needlecraft boutique. Kincaid, of the Downtown Development Corp., said she expected to see a growing group of retailers along the strip.

"Twenty years ago, this was the major retail center. Once Carolina Mall was built, most of the key anchors went to the mall," she said. "Now, small businesses want to come back downtown. It's not the malls where economists are predicting a major upswing. It's Main Street U.S.A." Kincaid said it makes sense for downtown to see a burst of activity now: The master plan, she said, gave investors a reason to look here. "Because we have (demographic) data and have just gone through an extensive visioning and planning process, people are (saying), 'Wow, these folks know where they want to go,'" Kincaid said. "Suddenly, there's confidence in the market." That's what Donna Wright says. Wright currently owns a children's store in Cornelius. Now the Concord resident is bringing the boutique - called Victoria & Friends - to 78 Union St. N. The shop will carry clothes, cribs, bedding and other items for children. "I started seeing more things opening up," she said. "That's what made me go ahead and do it now - before somebody else does."

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
December 23, 2001

**GIBSON VILLAGE GROUP STILL CONCERNED ABOUT STORE TRAFFIC, LOITERING, LITTER ARE THE MAIN WORRIES EXPRESSED BY RESIDENTS**

Author: RICHARD RUBIN

Residents are still worried a Latino grocery store on McGill Avenue will bring too much noise and traffic to the area, in spite of the Concord Planning and Zoning Commission efforts to craft a resolution to the simmering dispute. The commission, rehearing the case last week after a judge overturned its previous ruling against the store, allowed grocery sales there but set several conditions on store operations. The store - Cristy Tienda Mexicana - must close by 9 p.m., empty its trash bin at least twice a week, and keep the grounds clean.

In a hearing that lasted nearly three hours Tuesday, residents said they worried that a full-service grocery store - especially one with alcohol sales - would change the neighborhood's character, bringing litter, loitering, traffic, rotting food and late-night noise. There is already a convenience store across the street from Cristy's, and residents said alcohol sales there have caused problems with loitering and littering.

The grocery store is run by Cebastian Hernandez and his wife, Maria Cristina "Cristy" Rojas Salinas. She gained attention in March, when she shot at robbery suspects, and again in August, when she chased another group of robbery suspects up Interstate 85 as they shot at her. Both incidents occurred at the couple's other store on N.C. 73. They opened the larger McGill location in hopes they could close the N.C. 73 location. Neighbors started complaining about the McGill store shortly after it opened last summer. It has been operating under a "baked goods/snack shop" classification, under which it cannot sell a full line of groceries.

On Tuesday, building owner Allen James said the 3,000-square-foot grocery would not cause much additional traffic and noise. His attorney, Jim Scarbrough, and his development consultant, **Leonard Sossamon**, explained how they saw the grocery store fitting into the local neighborhood. They cited the increase in the Gibson Village area's Latino population and the other retail uses along McGill Avenue.

Commission member Maurice Grant said he thought the disagreement was a simple cultural misunderstanding that could have been solved without such a fuss if the building owner had talked to his tenant about what might be expected in the neighborhood. But, Grant told the residents, "because this particular tenant is culturally different and doesn't understand the rules of the game, that's why 95 percent of you people are here." But residents disagreed, saying they were opposed to any grocery store in that location, because of its size and inadequate parking. Association president Andrea Klauss said the conditions might help, but that alcohol sales were still a significant concern.

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It's not a racial issue, residents insisted, just part of the neighborhood association's ongoing work to improve area. Gibson Village, one of the city's older areas, is bounded generally by Cabarrus Avenue, the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks, Winecoff Avenue, Allison Street, McGill Avenue and Spring Street. The neighborhood association has worked with the city over the past year to demolish dilapidated houses, plan a greenway and clean up the mill village area. James, the building owner, pledged to work with the neighborhood association, saying he has a vested interest in keeping the area well-maintained and well-perceived.

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Salisbury Post (NC)  
October 29, 2000

**N.C. Republicans attacking Sossamon's record**

Author: SCOTT JENKINS

As the race for the 90th District seat in the N.C. House of Representatives heats up, the N.C. Republican Party is attacking Rep. **Leonard Sossamon's** brief legislative record. But **Sossamon**, a Democrat from Concord, says the party of his opponent, Linda Johnson of Kannapolis, is not only distorting the truth, but telling outright lies in its campaign to discredit him. The N.C. GOP has mailed at least four fliers to voters in the 90th District — which includes Kannapolis and Concord — during the past two weeks. Three of the glossy fliers accuse **Sossamon** of voting to “raid” the state’s Medicaid reserve fund for \$70 million to pay for “pet projects” like studies of turf grass and ocean crabs. One mailing shows a stack of \$20 bills being passed from one hand to another, with an arrow pointing to **Sossamon's** picture, indicating the money will be passed to him. Inside, the text begins, “**Leonard Sossamon** raided the Medicaid Trust Fund. You just can’t trust **Leonard Sossamon.**” The bill the flier refers to as its source is House Bill 1840, the appropriations portion of this year’s budget. **Sossamon** scoffs at the idea that he’s being attacked for voting for the budget.

Republicans voted in favor of the budget as well and are running for re-election touting it as an achievement, he said. Notably among them, **Sossamon** said, is Rep. Charlotte Gardner of Rowan County. “Charlotte voted for that, and I did too; so did Sen. Fletcher Hartsell (of Cabarrus County), who is a Republican,” he said. “I think it’s strange that, in my case, they’re trying to beat me up about it, and in other cases they’re running positive ads about it.”

In fact, the N.C. Democratic Party has done the same thing. It mailed a flier praising **Sossamon** for voting for increased teacher pay and help for seniors who can’t afford prescription drugs, citing the same budget bill. The General Assembly did move \$70 million from the Medicaid reserve fund to the regular 1999 Medicaid fund to pay for current expenses. That money replaced \$70 million in the regular Medicaid fund that was then returned to the general fund and became part of the state’s \$18 billion budget.

The money could conceivably have been used to pay for the studies the GOP refers to, but since it became part of the state’s larger general-fund pot, it’s hard to track specific dollars. The reserve fund was established to contain federal money put into the Medicaid system to help reimburse hospitals for their care of Medicaid patients, said a fiscal analyst familiar with state government. When the federal government overpays, the money is placed in the reserve, or trust account. Eventually the state must settle up with the federal government on overpayments. But Medicaid is an entitlement program, meaning anyone who meets the criteria set for receiving it cannot be turned down, **Sossamon** said. “I think what they’re trying to do is confuse seniors,” **Sossamon** said.

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Dan Gurley, political director for the N.C. GOP, admits that Republicans as well as Democrats voted in favor of the budget containing the transfer of funds. “There are a lot of bills that come out of the General Assembly that are not party-line votes,” Gurley said. “In this instance, we believed this was a bad vote for residents of the 90th House District.” Gurley said the 90th District seat is a “top tier” race for Republicans, who need to win seven seats in November to regain control of the House. It is an attractive race for several reasons, he said, including the fact that **Sossamon** was appointed to replace Richard Moore, who stepped down in May after pleading guilty to several felonies. “With him being appointed to the seat, there was not a long legislative record,” Gurley said. “We had to look at the votes he cast while in office.” Gurley said the Republican party’s research indicated the Medicaid issue “played very well for us, that it was important to voters in the district and it was a strong issue for Republicans to put forward.”

The fliers say they are not endorsed by a candidate. And Johnson, the Republican running for the seat, said she couldn’t comment specifically on them since she didn’t give them her blessing. But she said she opposes the “creative accounting” of shifting money among funds. A similar move, she said, left a hole in the ABCs fund for teacher bonuses that the state may be unable to fill next year. “I think you ought to balance the budget, and I think you ought to not leave holes for the next year,” she said. Johnson said she has received no direct financial support from the state GOP. It has sent out a flier on her behalf, saying that she’ll support a prescription drug plan for needy seniors.

The N.C. Democratic Party has mailed at least two other fliers praising **Sossamon** — one saying he’ll stand up to HMOs for better health care and one saying he’ll protect private information from telemarketers. The Republican party mailed at least one flier departing from the Medicaid issue. That one accuses **Sossamon** of voting to raise taxes on gas and electricity, but doesn’t cite a specific bill. **Sossamon** denies the charge. “They really screwed up this time, because that was voted on before I was ever in the House of Representatives,” he said.

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Salisbury Post (NC)  
September 30, 2000

**Sossamon, Johnson set their sights on 90th District seat**

Author: SCOTT JENKINS

Democrat **Leonard Sossamon Jr.** and Republican Linda Johnson square off Nov. 7 in a race that has gotten more publicity for who is not in it than who is. Richard Moore, a popular and rising young Democrat from Kannapolis, announced early this year that he would not seek a third term in the 90th N.C. House District. The announcement came amid allegations that the former A.L. Brown High School teacher committed sex-related crimes with former students. Moore left the Legislature in May after pleading guilty to three charges. The Cabarrus County Democratic Party nominated **Sossamon** to finish Moore's term, a natural move since **Sossamon** had won the Democratic primary only weeks earlier.

Johnson, a former member of the Kannapolis Board of Education, which accepted Moore's resignation from A.L. Brown, defeated Jim Gulley Jr. in the GOP primary. Gulley came up short against Moore in 1998 in one of the most expensive House races in the state. Now **Sossamon** — with a short session, some co-sponsored bills and several House votes under his belt — and Johnson have set their sights on the future, and the issues facing the state and the 90th District, which includes Kannapolis and Concord. The issues include nagging problems like road construction and maintenance, in which the state seems lagging locally. Other issues are populist rallying cries, like improving education. Still others are touchy subjects, like a state lottery, which some legislators — and both candidates — prefer to put to a vote of the people.

While they agree on a lottery referendum, the two disagree on other issues. **Sossamon** said he'd consider a moratorium on state executions to allow death-row inmates access to new technologies, like DNA testing. Johnson opposes such a moratorium, saying it would deny victims of crime the justice they and their families deserve.

**Leonard Sossamon Jr.**

**Sossamon**, 50, of 830 Courtney St. S.E. in Concord, calls himself a "bona fide newcomer." Though he spent several months this spring in Moore's old chair in Raleigh, **Sossamon** has never won public office or run a full race for one. He worked 13 years as Concord city manager and five years before that as the city planning director. He resigned in 1998 to become a founding partner in Hunter & Brown, a Concord real estate development company. A self-described fiscal conservative, **Sossamon** said he ran the city like a business, and the way he conducted business led some local residents to express surprise when he registered as a Democrat last spring. After he resigned, council members praised **Sossamon** for his work in aggressively pursuing new economic prospects, including Concord Mills, and pushing Concord Regional Airport.

**Sossamon** entered the Concord City Council race last year but withdrew, citing potential business conflicts. He said running in the 90th District is an extension of the work he did in the

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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public sector for more than two decades. And **Sossamon** cited that experience as evidence that he's more qualified for the job than Johnson. "I think I've got more experience dealing with large budgets and larger personnel issues," he said. "I think (voters) should consider that as an issue. They should look at my track record as opposed to hers, and they would vote for me." He also pointed out that he and Johnson part ways on a proposal that she supported while on the school board, giving local boards of education taxing authority. County commissioners provide school systems with funds now.

Johnson said that if school boards are going to be held accountable for education, they ought to have the authority to go along with that responsibility. **Sossamon** disagrees. "I'm not for giving another unit of government taxation authority," he said. "I think that's a slippery slope, and once we embark on it, who knows where it stops?" **Sossamon** said he believes the state can improve education by reducing class sizes, continuing to increase teachers' salaries and accountability and considering ways to help counties build schools, such as a redistribution of sales taxes. Supporting education means improving not only the public school system but the state's community colleges as well, he said. He supports the \$3.1 billion bond package that voters will decide on this fall. Another matter **Sossamon** said is best left to a referendum is a lottery, which proponents say could generate a great deal of money for public education.

During his brief stint in Raleigh, **Sossamon** served on the House Transportation Committee. Improving local roads is one of his priorities. Like most elected representatives and candidates from this area, where study after study finds the roads are worse than those in the east, **Sossamon** said the state's current funding formula isn't fair. He hopes to help change it. If voters send him to Raleigh, **Sossamon** said he'd try again to push through an expansion of the Homestead Exemption Act, a tax bill to benefit seniors that failed to pass in the short session, and look for ways the state can help seniors defray health-care costs.

Linda Johnson

Johnson, 55, of 1205 Berkshire Drive, Kannapolis, is a self-employed computer analyst and tax accountant who served eight years on the Kannapolis Board of Education. She's proud of her involvement in building A.L. Brown High School's Cyber Campus with money donated by businesses — and no taxpayer involvement — and creating a foundation to keep the Cyber Campus going. Johnson also highlights her involvement in rewriting system policy, which occurred during her first year on the board, and her work to teach abstinence in sex-education classes. The system made gains in academics and safety all eight years of her tenure, she said.

Though she's held no other elected offices, Johnson served six years as an appointed member of the Cabarrus County Parks and Recreation Commission, where she helped create a foundation to provide money for parks services during years when the county budget can't pay for them all. She also helped develop a plan for school recreation facilities to be used as public parks. "That's a double use of the tax dollar," she said. "I've been really proud of that." Johnson also has served on the boards of Head Start and Communities in Schools and was a founder of the Kannapolis Dixie Youth Baseball League. "I've been an activist for the community for 30 years, and I've



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always tried to solve the community's problems with common sense and concern for individuals," she said. "And I'd like to do that in Raleigh."

She has worked in Raleigh as an unpaid lobbyist for the N.C. School Boards Association and on behalf of local education needs, she said. She describes herself as conservative and said her background in accounting would help her analyze the state's budget and ensure that it's "really balanced, not just transferred from account to account, leaving a hole for next year."

Johnson said she has served as an elected official and not, like her opponent, as a government employee. That gives her an advantage, she said, because she knows what it is to seek and do the will of the people. "I believe representation is truly getting the wants and the desires and the needs of the community met at the local level, making sure the voices of the businesses, the community, the individuals are heard in Raleigh," she said. Johnson agrees with **Sossamon** that those voices should be heard on the question of a state lottery, though she calls it a "quick fix" and fears it would allow the Legislature to divert current education funding elsewhere in the budget.

To improve education, Johnson supports the continued use and refining of the ABCs of Education accountability program, more focus on campus safety and an increase in the numbers of teacher assistants and school nurses. Johnson said she'd like to see the state spend more money on education. She said it could, without raising taxes, find the money to live up to its 1931 pact with counties to pay expenses for county-built schools. Right now, about 25 percent of the Kannapolis system's budget pays utility bills, she said. "I believe in the taxpayers' money going to schools to help solve a lot of problems," she said. "I think it's an important time to have an education representative in Raleigh." On transportation, Johnson agrees with **Sossamon** that the main culprit in Cabarrus County's road woes is the uneven way Raleigh distributes money. The problem won't be solved, she said, until Cabarrus gains more political clout in Raleigh and forces the state to face the issue.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
May 17, 2000

**SOSSAMON NAMED TO FILL CABARRUS SEAT IN LEGISLATURE**

Author: COURTNEY ST. ONGE

Cabarrus County Democrats unanimously recommended former Concord City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** to fill the N.C. House District 90 seat left open by Richard Moore's resignation last week. The district executive committee voted 22-0 on Tuesday to have **Sossamon** go to Raleigh and finish Moore's term. **Sossamon** likely will be sworn in today after Gov. Jim Hunt affirms the recommendation. "I really do appreciate the opportunity," **Sossamon** said. "It really is a strong vote of confidence from the people." **Sossamon** was the logical choice; he won the Democratic nomination for the seat earlier this month. Both of his opponents in the primary, Richard Anderson and Wayne Troutman, supported his appointment.

In November, **Sossamon** will run against Kannapolis school board member Linda P. Johnson, who won the Republican primary. Moore, 29, was the youngest member of the N.C. House and a rising star in the state Democratic Party before allegations of misconduct surfaced last summer. Moore, a one-time A.L. Brown High School teacher, was accused of inappropriate behavior with former male students. He resigned his seat in the General Assembly on May 7, on the eve of its short session. Later that week, he pleaded guilty to one felony count of crime against nature and two misdemeanor counts of attempted crime against nature.

The Cabarrus County Democratic Party executive committee met May 7 to hear Moore's resignation, but party officials agreed to wait until Tuesday to choose a replacement. County party Chairman John Clark said they wanted to vote when all precincts were represented. He said it was important to get someone to the legislature to represent District 90 as soon as possible. Clark said he hopes that having **Sossamon** run as an incumbent will help the Democrats' chances in November. "The conventional wisdom is that being an incumbent helps," he said. "If we can get him there now, it could."

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
February 28, 1998

**CONCORD MANAGER TO RESIGN**

Author: SCOTT VERNER

The city manager who has led Concord through one of the most aggressive periods of growth and change in its history announced Friday he will resign in April. **Leonard Sossamon** told the city council he would leave April 10 after 13 years as city manager to go into the real estate development business. **Sossamon**, 47, a city administrator for 18 years, most recently helped shepherd the land deals for the 1,800-acre Kings Grant development. That project includes the 1.4 million-square-foot Concord Mills regional outlet mall, another outlet mall and plans for a city convention center/hotel complex.

Ground breaking is set for Wednesday on the Concord Mills mall at Kings Grant, which Mayor George Liles cited as **Sossamon's** crowning achievement. "He's been a real genius in getting that done," Liles said. "There's been some criticism about the city getting into the real estate business, but we needed to do it to get things started out there (at Kings Grant). Now we're going to have a full-service hotel and convention center there, and we'll be out of the real estate business."

**Sossamon** worked to expand and improve the city's and Cabarrus County's water system, including construction of a new reservoir on Coddle Creek and a water treatment plant nearby. He also has led efforts to develop industrial parks and establish tax incentives that helped the city recruit several major industries; build and expand a new city airport; develop a city golf club; and build new low-income and affordable housing. "Everything that's made this city progressive has been under his regime. All the good things that have happened, and the progress going on here, he's been the one that implemented it all," Liles said. "We think of things to do, he tells us how to get it done." **Sossamon** will continue to live in Cabarrus County, Liles said. Attempts to reach the city manager Friday were unsuccessful.

Liles said he has appointed himself and council members Lamar Barrier, Alfred Brown and Scott Padgett to a search committee to find a new city manager. "It could take months, and it probably will," Liles said. No interim manager has been named yet, he said. **Sossamon**, a Cabarrus County native and a 1968 graduate of Mount Pleasant High School, was hired as the city's planning director in 1980. He replaced G.L. Greeson as city manager in 1985. "Leonard is the type that when he goes after something, he goes after it 110 percent," said Barrier, who is in his fourth four-year term on the city council. "He's been a big help to me over the past 12 years. . . . He's done an excellent job. I'll miss him."

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
October 10, 1997

**CHAMBER SEEKS INSPIRATION IN CABARRUS**

Author: GAIL SMITH

Next to a table offering cheese Danish and imported gourmet coffee, Union County officials chatted about what they hoped to gain from their trip to Cabarrus County: Ideas on how Union could duplicate some of Cabarrus' recent economic success. On Wednesday, more than 30 Union Chamber of Commerce officials went to Concord for their 1997 intercounty visit - ready to hear about economic development incentives, governmental cooperation and tourism promotion. "Cabarrus County has done a great job of putting their act together," said Frank Carpenter, chairman of the Union chamber. "Cabarrus is a model for us with very similar opportunities," said Jim Carpenter, the Union chamber president. He's not related to the chairman.

Cabarrus and Union are similar in size and face the same growth issues, such as school overcrowding and industrial recruitment. Union's population is about 104,000; Cabarrus has about 120,000. Jim Carpenter admitted that Cabarrus, a prime competitor for industry, has "a leg up" on Union with its road systems and proximity to University Research Park and UNC Charlotte. Recently Cabarrus has pulled off some regional coups, including landing Sysco's new Charlotte area headquarters, Corning Inc.'s \$300 million optical fiber plant under construction in Midland and the planned 1.5 million-square-foot Concord Mills mall at the Cabarrus/Mecklenburg line. Cabarrus and the city of Concord created its tax-rebate packages for industrial and retail projects as incentives to balance residential growth with more commercial development, Cabarrus County Manager Frank Clifton told the Union officials.

Clifton and Concord City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** both cited cooperation between the county and other local governing boards as key to recruiting success. And they said it's important to have strong leaders with broad vision serving on city and county boards, not people with narrow agendas. And access to an interstate highway is important, but it's not the make-or-break advantage, Clifton told the group. "Corning located in south Cabarrus County, almost as far away from the interstate as you can get," Clifton said. Union County should focus on what it can offer, he said - not what it can't. Bob Smith, elected Tuesday night to the Monroe City Council, said one of the main things he learned from the Cabarrus trip was the need to balance residential and industrial growth. And Smith, also a former Monroe school board chairman, said Union County may need to consider a room/hotel tax, which Cabarrus has, to bring in revenue for its tourism industry.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
May 23, 1997

**CONCORD ROAD TAX PROPOSED**

Author: *GAIL SMITH, Staff Writer*

Concord's roads are getting more congested by the day, and City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** said the city should raise taxes to do something about it. He proposed Thursday a 2-cent increase to bring in up to \$630,000 to improve intersections and add traffic signals and turn lanes. "That's not going to create a situation where all the ills will be cured, but at least it's a start," **Sossamon** said of the roads money. The current city tax rate is 44 cents per \$100 in assessed valuation. The proposed increase would raise city taxes \$24 on a home assessed at \$120,000.

Mayor George Liles said that Concord has a "terrible traffic problem" and that residents want the city to do something. "People are really concerned about it," he said. Liles and City Council members said the city, with the \$630,000 in hand, could get projects done more quickly - perhaps in combination with state road money. Council member Scott Padgett said the city has serious traffic problems, but said it's too early to tell whether he's ready to support a tax increase for roads.

Local traffic planners have said many of the city's two-lane roads don't have the capacity to handle the heavier traffic load, including tractor-trailers that need more room for wider turns. **Sossamon** mentioned U.S. 29, N.C. 73, Poplar Tent Road and N.C. 136 as troubled roads. The proposed operating budget is slightly more than \$25 million, a 3.7 percent increase over the current budget. Also included in the proposed budget is a 10 percent increase in city sewer rates, increased fees for services such as planning and zoning permits and maps, and a 401(k) investment savings plan for city employees. The public is invited to a hearing on the budget at 7 p.m. June 2, in the council meeting room at the city municipal building, 26 Union Street South. The budget is available at the clerk's office in the municipal building.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
June 27, 1995

CONCORD BUDGET  
**CONCORD'S '95-96 BUDGET INCLUDES PROPERTY TAX INCREASE**

Author: *GAIL SMITH, Staff Writer*

Tax bills for most property owners in Concord will increase slightly next year, under the new 1995-96 budget approved Monday by the Concord Board of Aldermen. The budget passed 6-1, with Alderman Lamar Barrier against. Barrier said no because most of the cost increases are because of the city's approved annexation of a section of western Cabarrus. "It's hard for me to vote on the budget since I voted against the annexation," Barrier said after the meeting. The city plans to annex the section on Dec. 31. About 6,200 people live in the area. Most of the tax revenue from the area won't arrive until the next budget year, but services such as police protection have to be provided when the annexation occurs. The budget year runs from July 1 to June 30. The operating budget of \$20.1 million is down nearly \$200,000 from earlier proposals.

City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** trimmed travel budgets, cut fire department capital equipment costs and other expenses. The tax rate is 44 cents per \$100 in assessed valuation. That's down 2 cents from last year. Still, most property owners will have larger tax bills because of higher property values after the 1995 revaluation. For example, a home assessed at \$100,000 last year had a tax bill of \$460. If the assessment on that home increased to \$115,000 during the revaluation, the bill under the lower rate will be \$506.

Starting next month, water and sewer rates will go up 5 percent. There's also more money toward needed park improvements, said Mayor George Liles. The city will spend \$30,000 for Caldwell Park in the Logan community. It will also install lights and fencing for a softball field at Concord High School and upgrade deteriorating equipment at other parks, said city Parks Director C.D. Lyons.

In another matter, Liles noted that the city and Cabarrus County on Monday closed the deal to transfer Lake Concord to the county in exchange for the county's water and sewer lines in the city's jurisdiction. Cabarrus plans to turn Lake Concord into a park. "We hope this is an indication of how the city and county can work together," Liles said.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
March 29, 1994

**BARBER-SCOTIA COLLEGE TO PAY \$55,419 UTILITY BILL GRADUALLY  
DEFERMENT PLAN KEEPS CITY FROM CUTTING OFF SERVICE <**

Author: JIM WRINN

In its struggle to stay open, Barber-Scotia College cleared a major hurdle Monday. Minutes before Concord city offices closed at 5 p.m., college President Asa Spaulding called City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** to accept the city's offer to accept gradual payment of a \$55,419 utility bill. If the offer had not been accepted, crews today would have cut off water, sewer and electric service to college offices, classrooms and dormitories. That would have shut down the college and displaced hundreds of students from dorms and from apartments rented by the school. The buildings would have been considered uninhabitable under city code, **Sossamon** said. The agreement calls for the financially troubled college to pay at least \$15,000 of its utility bill by noon Thursday, another \$15,000 by noon April 15 and the balance - \$25,419 - by noon April 29. Of the school's utility bill, \$25,752.31 is overdue, **Sossamon** said. The rest of the bill is not yet past due, he said.

Efforts to reach Spaulding and Charlotte Hornets owner George Shinn, who is chairman of the school's board of trustees, were unsuccessful Monday. Before talking with Spaulding late Monday, **Sossamon** said the city did not want to cut off the school's utilities but would have no choice. The next hurdle the school faces this week is its payroll of about \$400,000, due to faculty and staff members Friday, a source close to the college has said. The school also owes more than \$100,000 to the company that provides its food service, sources say. Dr. Joel Nwagbaroacha resigned earlier this month as president of the historically black liberal arts college, amid reports of financial mismanagement and news the school was more than \$1 million in debt. Spaulding, then trustees chairman, was named the new president.

Shinn was named to replace Spaulding as trustees chairman, and he pledged \$1 million to the school. But Shinn said Friday the money would not be forthcoming unless the school developed a business plan to get out of debt. On Monday, employees of Shinn were seen at the school, apparently signaling that Shinn's help is on the way, a source said. Last week Nwagbaroacha challenged the way his resignation was handled, saying Shinn and Spaulding "usurped the authority" of the board. Some students said they rejected Shinn's help and Spaulding's leadership. But on Monday, students started coming forward with appreciation. "I'm grateful for anything George Shinn can do to help us," said junior Greg Miller of Charlotte. "I feel like we're in a financial slump right now, but only positive things can happen from here on."

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
March 22, 1990

**HEALING HUGO`S SCARS**

Author: JIM WRINN and Scott Verner

Six months ago this morning, Cabarrus County residents cowered in their homes as the predawn fury of Hurricane Hugo raged around them. Later they emerged from their homes to find downed trees, broken power lines, debris and property damage everywhere. Falling trees smashed some people`s homes or cars. Other people suffered no more than overturned trash cans or torn-off shingles.

Today, six months after the storm, most of the highly visible effects of the Sept. 22 hurricane have faded. But the scars of Hurricane Hugo remain embedded in Cabarrus County, and recovery is still taking place. In fact, the Cabarrus chapter of the American Red Cross only last week wrapped up its relief work. ``We were just last week finishing up our last case,`` said executive director Carol Venzlaff. ``So it`s taken us six months to get to this point. ``One house almost had to be renovated from the ground up,`` Venzlaff said. The house needed a new roof, new interior walls, new plumbing and electrical systems and much more, she said. ``The bills haven`t been paid yet, but the work is done,`` Venzlaff said. Part of the cost will be reimbursed with a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. And a group of 10 Mennonites volunteered the labor, staying three weeks. The Red Cross paid their room, board and expenses until they left Cabarrus County about two weeks ago, Venzlaff said. Now the Red Cross is busy preparing and recruiting volunteers to help with disasters that may occur here as a result of tornadoes or fires that could be worsened by remaining hurricane damage.

Venzlaff said about 25 trained volunteers are needed. A basic disaster training course will be offered April 28, she said. The storm`s mighty fist fell hard on Concord`s electrical system, which serves 15,000 customers in and around Concord. Officials say 99 percent of service was interrupted. Repair work began the day of the storm, has gone on for half a year and now could stretch out as long as another six months. ``We still have a number of areas where there were poles and power lines rebuilt or restored just the easiest, quickest and safest way at the time to get power back on,`` said Steve Slough, Concord`s director of public utilities. ``What was done was to put on a Band-Aid; now we`re going back and taking the Band-Aid off and making a permanent fix.`` A contract crew that has been helping the city restore its power system will continue to work for about another four to six weeks, Slough said. ``We`re still putting our electrical services back to a permanent status,`` said City Manager **Leonard Sossamon**. ``Our system was in really good shape before Hugo. It`s taking us a long time to go back and make sure we`ve got everything put back together.``

**City Saves Some Money**

Although the repair work is continuing, the city expects to come out slightly better than expected on the dollars it will have to plunk down. ``We originally were talking between \$4 million and



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\$4.5 million," **Sossamon** said. "One (electrical) substation was knocked out on N.C. 73 East, and we thought we were going to have to replace it." That might have cost \$1 million, but was repaired for about \$100,000, he said. **Sossamon** now estimates costs to the city of between \$3 million and \$3.5 million from the hurricane. So far Concord has received \$1.5 million in disaster aid reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. **Sossamon** said he expects to file a claim this spring to FEMA for another \$500,000.

Kannapolis, which does not own its own electrical system, finished its Hugo cleanup in December and put the price of the effort at \$267,331, almost double what it originally anticipated. The city has received \$113,073 in reimbursements from FEMA. "We expect to receive the other part," said City Manager Gene McCombs. "Our biggest unexpected thing was the amount of debris. At first we estimated our cleanup at \$150,000, but it just kept coming. People kept bringing more stuff out, and we had to keep revising our estimates upward."

#### Some Damage Was Hidden

Some Hugo damage wasn't fully apparent until weeks or months after the hurricane passed. The band building at A.L. Brown High School in Kannapolis, for example, had shingles torn off and hurled back into the roof of the building. The support framework wasn't damaged, but the embedded shingles made the roof susceptible to leaks, enough to prompt officials to replace it. "We knew it had happened, but we didn't know how bad it was until we looked at the roof close up in January," said Ernest Macon, assistant superintendent of the Kannapolis City Schools, who is in charge of buildings. This summer, Macon said, the roof will be replaced. "The solutions for many of the Hugo situations are coming long after the hurricane," he said. The roof at Jackson Park Elementary School in Kannapolis, however, will meet a different fate. A recent decision to build a new classroom building means temporary roof repairs won't be made permanent.

#### No Sign Of Leaks

Some things that were devastated by the hurricane, however, have been renewed with no lasting effects. It is amazing to Neil Shouse, principal at Mount Pleasant Middle School, that the second-floor classrooms now show no effects where roof damage allowed water to pour in. "It's just like there never was a problem," he said. Immediately after the hurricane, school maintenance workers built plywood sluices to channel the water out. The months haven't dulled his images of the people who helped, said Slough, the Concord utilities director. "I just have to praise the dedication of the men who worked day in and day out for 12 to 15 days immediately following the storm, and the people who responded, the people who gave the crews food, the overwhelming community response," he said.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
December 19, 1989

**CONCORD, FIELDCREST MAKE PACT**  
**COMPANY HAS 2 YEARS TO REDUCE POLLUTANTS<**  
Author: LAURIE WILLIS

The Concord Board of Aldermen on Monday unanimously approved an agreement with Fieldcrest Cannon specifying deadlines for reducing the pollutants the company discharges into the city's wastewater treatment plant. "The agreement sets up deadlines for certain improvements to be made by Fieldcrest Cannon and if they aren't made, certain action by the city can and will be taken," said Steve Slough, public utilities director. "We've sat down and discussed it with them, and they've agreed." Slough said the company has been discharging for several years excessive pollutants into the city's Rocky River Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. "The agreement outlines a series of benchmarks they'll work toward achieving," City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** said.

The agreement gives Fieldcrest Cannon about two years to comply, **Sossamon** said. Their first deadline is sometime in January 1990. Penalties will also be higher if the deadlines aren't met. Among changes the board has approved in its Water Sewer Ordinance is an increase in fees for violations from \$50 to \$1,000. Also Monday, the board approved an agreement with the county authorizing the two governments to cooperate in areas where each offers services to cut off those services for customers who don't pay their bills. For example, if the city provides water service and the county has sewer service and a customer refuses to pay his sewer bill, the county can cut off that customer's water even if that bill is currently paid, Slough said. The agreement will be used as a last resort and is designed to ensure both governments get paid, **Sossamon** said.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
April 25, 1989

**CONCORD BALANCES ITS BUDGET**  
**CITY MANAGER EXPECTS NO INCREASE IN TAXES<**  
Author: TED DeADWYLER

For the seventh year in a row, Concord residents will pay 47 cents per \$100 of valuation under the recommended 1989-90 city budget released Monday. ``You can't beat that - a budget without a tax increase,`` said alderman Frank Dusch. City Manager **Leonard Sossamon** credited the aldermen and city officials for the stable tax rate. ``It happened due to good and solid directions and policies established by the board of aldermen. It happened due to superior administration, sound fiscal management and astute operations by the city`s management and staff,`` said **Sossamon**. The city`s proposed general fund budget totals \$12.9 million, up from the current budget of \$11.7 million.

In addition, the proposed budget includes \$22.2 million to provide electric service for city customers, \$4.2 million to operate the Rocky River Waste Treatment Plant, \$3.7 million to run the sewer system and \$3.2 million to operate the water system. The proposed general fund budget includes \$323,000 to begin the second phase of the downtown ``Streetscape`` project by continuing sidewalk renovations on Union Street and adding decorative lighting and traffic signals on Church Street. Another \$176,000 would be used to pave 13,000 feet of dirt streets formerly maintained by the state but recently taken over by the city.

In addition, the budget adds several employees to the utility department to conduct water and sewer line inspections and gives all city employees a 5 percent pay raise. To balance the budget without raising the tax rate, the city would use \$549,000 of its \$5.3 million undesignated fund balance or savings account. ``I think we have to give credit to the staff and **Leonard (Sossamon)** because this budget is a job well done,`` said Mayor Bernie Edwards.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
March 12, 1989

**OFFICIALS SWAP NOTES AT CONFERENCE**

Author: TED DeADWYLER

While in Washington for several days last week, county commissioner William Hamby got a chance to look into an issue Cabarrus County will soon face. What can be done with solid waste as the county landfill reaches capacity? "I had an interesting conversation with county officials from the Memphis area who were dealing with tons of garbage. Their answer was incineration. I don't know if it will work here, but it is worth looking into," he said.

The conversation was an example why Hamby and other county officials who were in Washington say they find the trip a valuable part of improving county services. "It is always good to talk with other county officials and compare notes," said Giles Moss, who has gone to several of the gatherings. Five Cabarrus County commissioners and two county officials - County Manager Mike Ruffin and Finance Director Blair Bennett - last week attended the National Association of Counties (NACO) annual legislative conference at the Washington Hilton. The conference - at which speakers included Vice President Dan Quayle - attracted about 2,000 county officials from around the county.

And now that county officials have returned from the nation's capital, city officials from Cabarrus County are scheduled to be in Washington through Tuesday for the legislative conference of the National League of Cities. From Concord, City Manager **Leonard Sossamon**, City Attorney Gordon Belo, mayor pro tem Jim Dorton and alderman Laine Harling are scheduled to attend. And from Kannapolis, Mayor Bachman Brown, mayor pro tem Harold Holbrook and council member Ken Geathers are scheduled to go.

**Sossamon** said the gathering, also held at the Washington Hilton, will help the city prepare for federal legislation. The city manager said he was especially concerned about environmental and housing issues. "I understand there is some proposed legislation that might force cities to monitor discharges into drainage basins, and that could be quite costly," he said. **Sossamon** said he also wants to know more about how the federal government will provide housing assistance - either through subsidies or new construction. "We want to see what type of housing help we can expect for our citizens," he said.

Harling, who also wants to focus on environmental concerns, said the trip will give city officials a different perspective. "We will find out how the city relates to the rest of the country. And we can also see what direction the federal government is headed. You need time to take a broader look at things," he said. Usually there are some light moments on the trip, too. Several county officials, for example, traveled to Landover, Md., to watch the Charlotte Hornets play the Washington Bullets. They weren't alone. Members of other North Carolina delegations also were in the audience, they said.

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Charlotte Observer, The (NC)  
April 6, 1986

**DIAPER COLLECTION CONTROVERSY PITS MOTHER AGAINST CITY**

Author: TED DeADWYLER

Who says you can't fight City Hall? A Concord woman is giving it a try. In a dispute over whether the garbage collectors will take away disposable diapers, Sandy Feibelman-Coppola, mother of two, has temporarily triumphed. "I think we won the war," said the Beverly Drive resident, after city workers picked up her garbage and children's diapers late last week. The city, however, will have the final word. "To prevent any inconvenience, we decided to continue pickups, but we haven't changed our policy," city manager **Leonard Sossamon** said Thursday.

The disagreement started a week and a half ago when a supervisor with Concord's public works department came to Coppola's door. Coppola said she was told her family's garbage would not be picked up unless the disposable diapers were put in a separate bag and placed on the curb for curbside pickup once a week, on Fridays. "My reaction was that I pay city taxes and I assume that my garbage will be picked up," said Coppola. She and her husband have a 2-year-old son, Chris, and a 3-month-old daughter, Laura. Later that afternoon, she went to City Hall to get a copy of the city's garbage collection ordinance and talk with officials at the public works department. Still unappeased, Coppola called city manager **Leonard Sossamon**, who told her he would look into the matter.

The next day, just as the public works supervisor warned, city garbage collectors did not remove her garbage. "They picked up the bag of garbage, looked at it and then put it back in the container," said Coppola, who says she rinses, rewraps and tapes diapers before placing them in a plastic bag for disposal. She then got back on the phone. After talking with **Sossamon** and city attorney Gordon Belo, Coppola said the two told her the city's policy was not to collect diapers along with garbage. The county landfill accepts disposable diapers. But city garbage collectors don't take human waste in backyard collections because of the tendency of plastic bags to burst as they are compressed in a garbage truck compactor, said a public works official. She said she was told the policy calls for pickup of disposable diapers in plastic bags along with household trash from curbside each week.

Coppola didn't think that was a good idea. "I think it would lead to an unsanitary condition," said the 31-year-old mother, whose family moved to Concord last year from Charlotte. "When it is hot and humid, the situation would be intolerable." In addition, neighbors with small children in disposable diapers had no problems with garbage collection, contended Coppola, who says her children go through 100 diapers a week. "It eemed as though I was being singled out," she said. Next, **Sossamon** paid a visit to the Coppola home to inspect the disposable diaper garbage, but didn't give Coppola any assurance the garbage would be picked up from the plastic container by city workers next time. With diapers piling up, she then began to turn on the heat.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Coppola, a former social worker in Wake County, called a local radio station and several newspapers to talk about the dispute. She requested time to appear before the Concord Board of Aldermen at its Thursday meeting.

And Coppola said she contacted the Concord/Cabarrus County Chamber of Commerce to say she planned to write companies thinking of locating here. She said she planned to tell them `Concord is a hostile city toward families with young children.` However, after missing one day`s pickup, three city workers came to her home in a truck about 2 p.m. March 28 and took away her garbage, including diapers. Still, Coppola had no assurance her garbage would be picked up the following week. But word from **Sossamon** came Wednesday, she said, that her garbage, including disposable diapers, would be collected. Her persistence paid off, she said. ``But I`m still a bit frustrated that it took all this time and effort to get the city to change its mind,`` said Coppola, who will appear before the aldermen Thursday. **Sossamon** says Coppola`s garbage collections are continuing only while the city studies its policy.

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