

# **Bridging the Gap:** **Political Acceptability** **Operational Sustainability**

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Virginia Institute of Government

**VLGMA Winter Conference 2024**

Used with permission from Dr. John Nalbandian

# Session Agenda

- Presentation: Doug Walker (60 Minutes)
- *Break* (10 Minutes)
- Panel Discussion: Leslie Beauregard, Sam Sanders, Beth Simms (60 Minutes)
- Q & A (20 Minutes)

# Presentation Outline

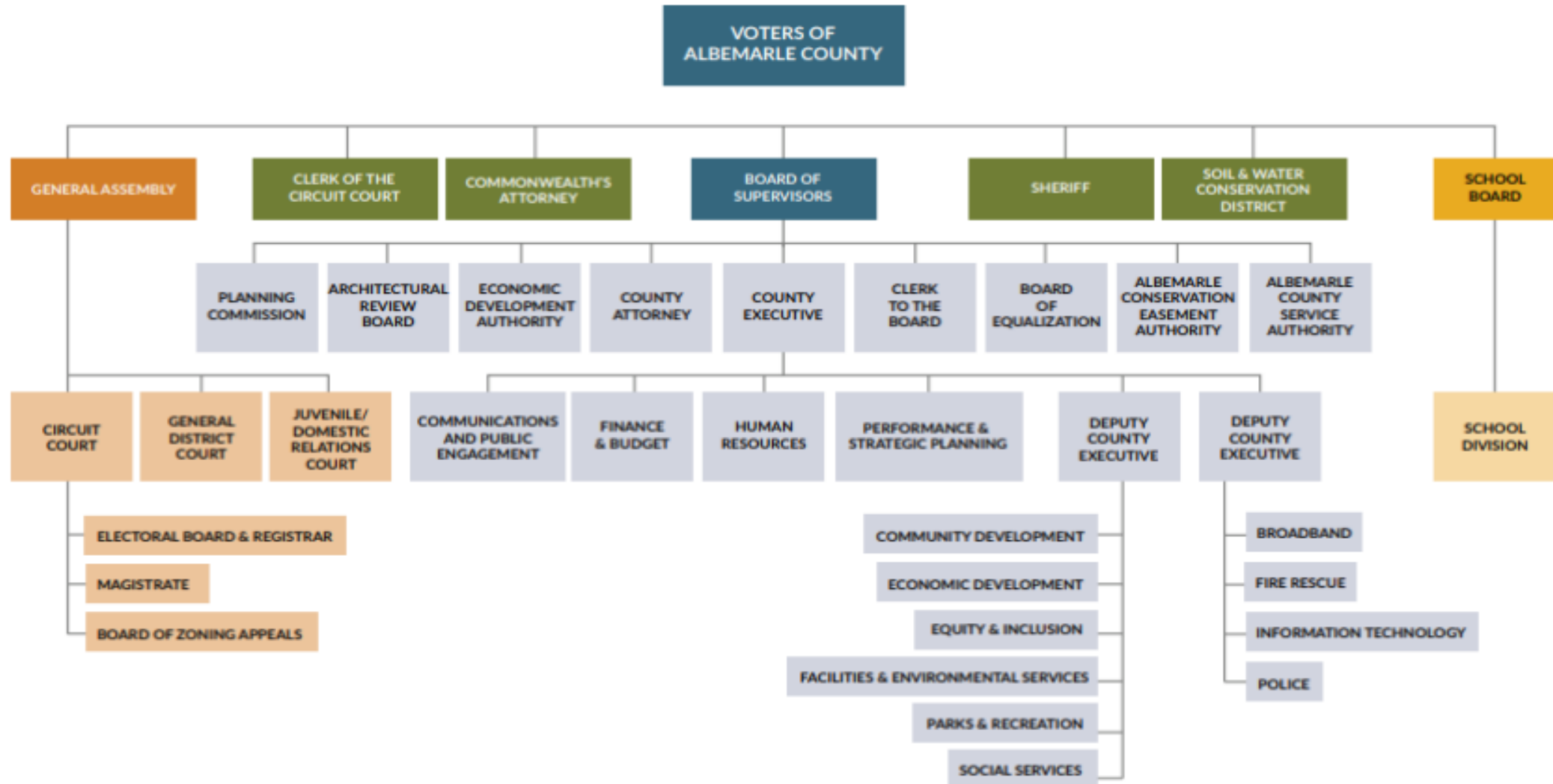
- A gap exists and is growing between what is politically acceptable (what we want to do) and operationally sustainable (can we do it?)
- Bridging the gap is facilitated by understanding that politics involves choices among conflicting values.
- The foundational characteristics of politics and administration are distinct and are key to understanding how to effectively bridge the gap.
- Democracy is messy. Local government is tedious. Guideposts can help with navigation.
- Be the bridge.

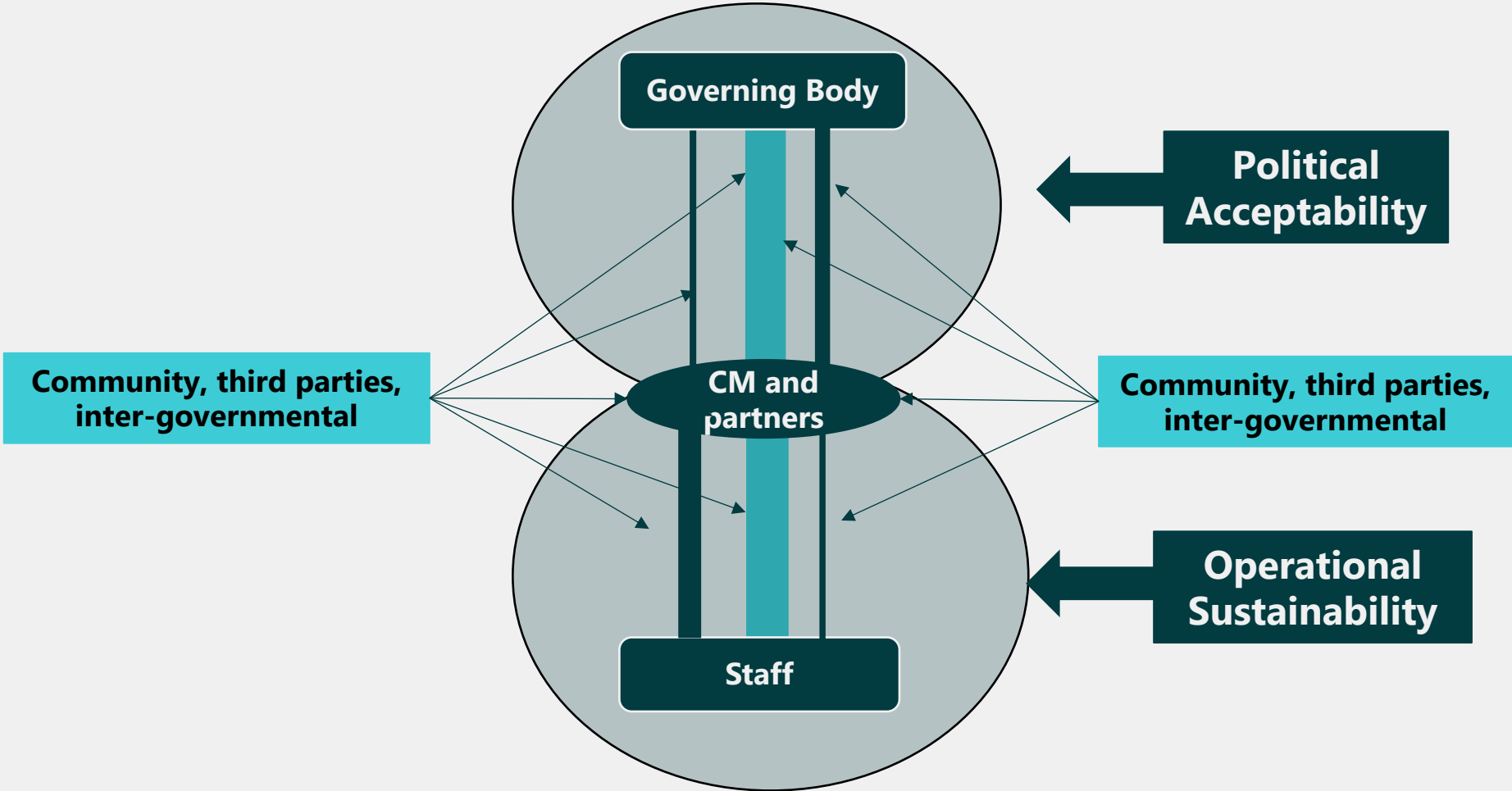
# Form of Government

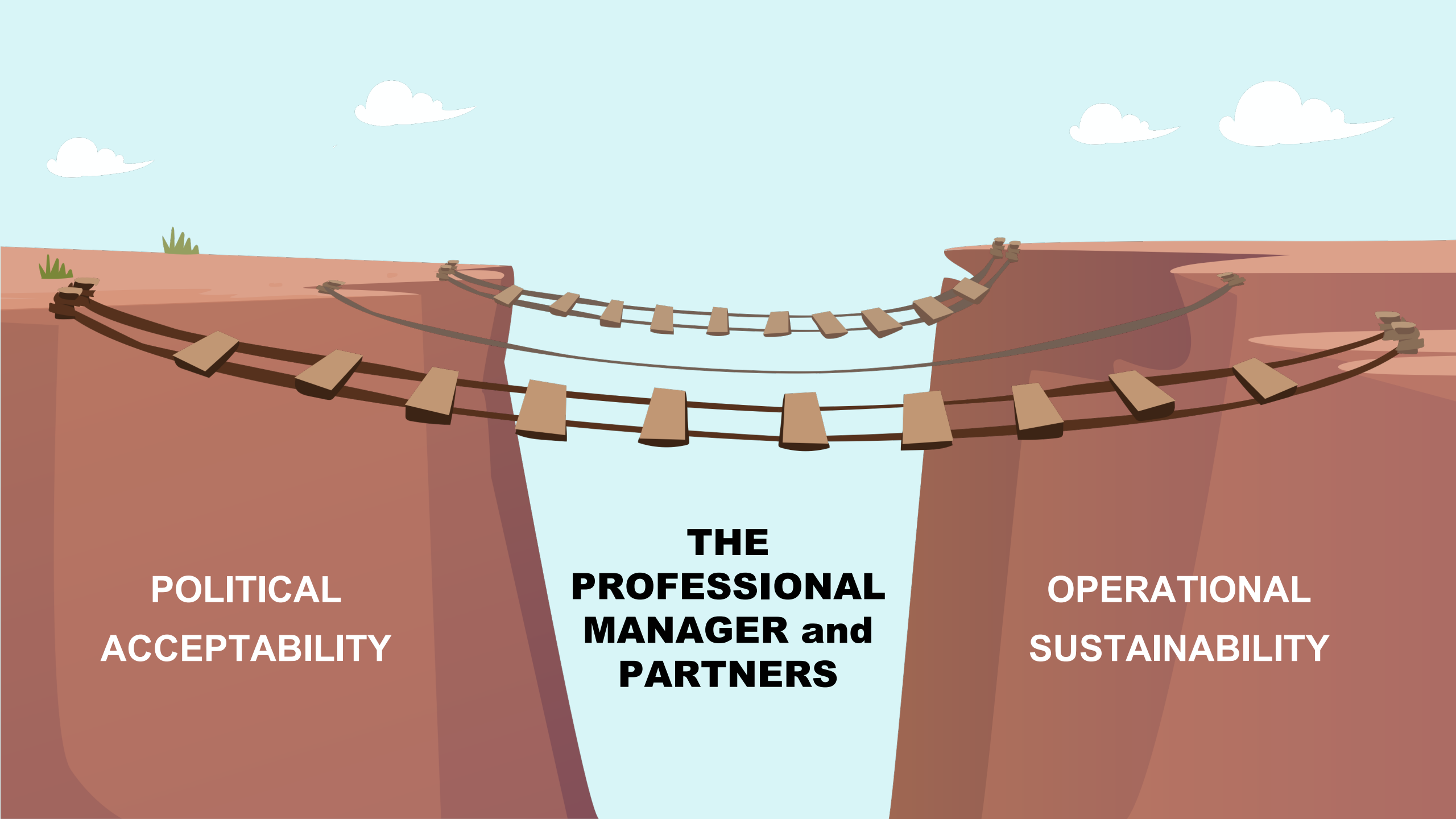
Let's start with acknowledging that, with one exception, cities, counties and towns in Virginia operate under some version of the Council-Manager form of government.

- Code of Virginia (primarily 15.2)
- City/Town Charter (approved by the General Assembly)
- City/County/Town Codes and Ordinances
- Local Government Policies
- Constitutional Officers
- Regional/Local Authorities, Commissions, Etc.

# ORGANIZATION CHART







POLITICAL  
ACCEPTABILITY

**THE  
PROFESSIONAL  
MANAGER and  
PARTNERS**

OPERATIONAL  
SUSTAINABILITY

# Values ([Values video](#))

**Responsiveness =**



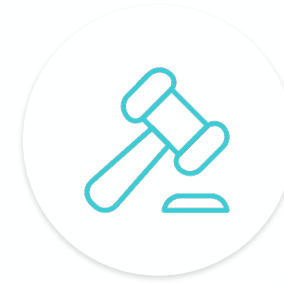
**Representation/  
Participation**



**Efficiency and  
Effectiveness/  
Professionalism**



**Social Equity,  
Diversity, and  
Inclusion**



**Justice and  
Individual Rights**



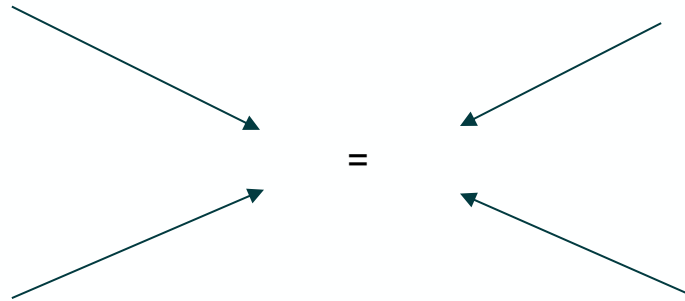
# Characteristics of Politics and Administration

	Political Acceptability		Operational Sustainability
Characteristics	Politics		Administration
Activity	Game/allocation of values	CAO, Senior Staff and Third Parties in the GAP  Electeds*	Problem Solving
Players	Representatives/trustees		Experts-trustees
Conversation	“What do you hear?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Passion</li> <li>■ Dreams</li> <li>■ Stories</li> </ul>		“What do you know?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Data</li> <li>■ Plans</li> <li>■ Reports</li> </ul>
Pieces	Intangible: Interests and symbols		Tangible: Information; money, people, equipment
Currency	Power (stories), loyalty, trust		Knowledge (deeds)
Dynamics	Constructive conflict, compromise, change		Predictability, cooperation, continuity

# Alignment of Elected Officials and City Staff

What do elected officials need from administrative personnel?

What do administrative personnel need from elected officials?




What are elected officials willing and able to provide administrative personnel?

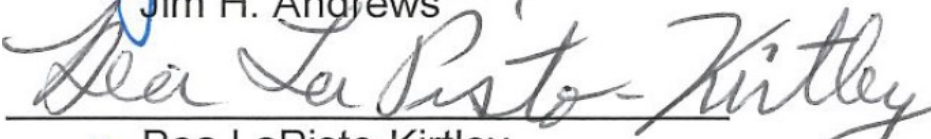
What are administrative personnel willing and able to provide to elected officials?


Albemarle County Board of Supervisors  
Operating Guidelines for High Quality Governance


*The Board commits to using the following guidelines to ensure high quality governance:*


1. The County's strategic priorities will guide the work of the Board and staff and will be supported by a thoughtful priority setting process and cycle.
2. We will honor the expressed will of the majority and respect the concerns of the minority.
3. We ensure that policy decisions and directions to the County Executive are communicated by the entire Board. Where this is unclear, the County Executive will seek clarification from the Board. No single member of the Board can provide direction on policy implementation to the County Executive, or County Staff.
4. Board Members do not want their interactions with and requests to staff members to negatively impact staff productivity.
  - Staff members should use judgment and explain the resources that would be required to respond to Board requests.
  - If a policy issue is going to affect workload or a policy decision, it should come through the County Executive's office.
5. When a Board Member sends a communication to a staff member, it should be copied to the department director and the appropriate member of the County Executive's Office. Urgent matters will be clearly labeled in the subject line.
6. To assure maximum productivity, the Board should focus on policy-making work and the staff should focus on day-to-day operational work and provide progress reports.
7. We are responsible for our districts, the entire County, and the region; therefore, we should give our best efforts to work for the benefit of all.
8. When a Board Member has a concern regarding staff performance, we go directly to the County Executive in a timely manner so that it can be addressed.


  
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Jim H. Andrews

  
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Bea LaPisto-Kirtley

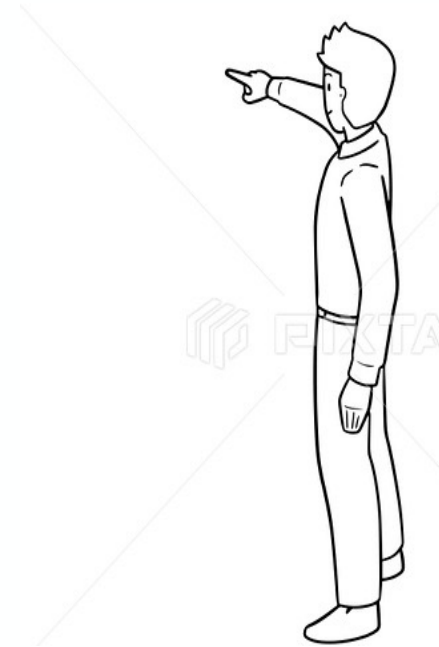
  
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Diantha H. McKeel

  
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Ned L. Gallaway

  
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Ann H. Mallek

  
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Donna P. Price

# The messy part



# Guideposts

**ICMA/VLGMA  
Code of  
Ethics**

*Tenet 10 : “Resist any encroachment on professional responsibilities, believing the member should be free to carry out official policies without interference...”*

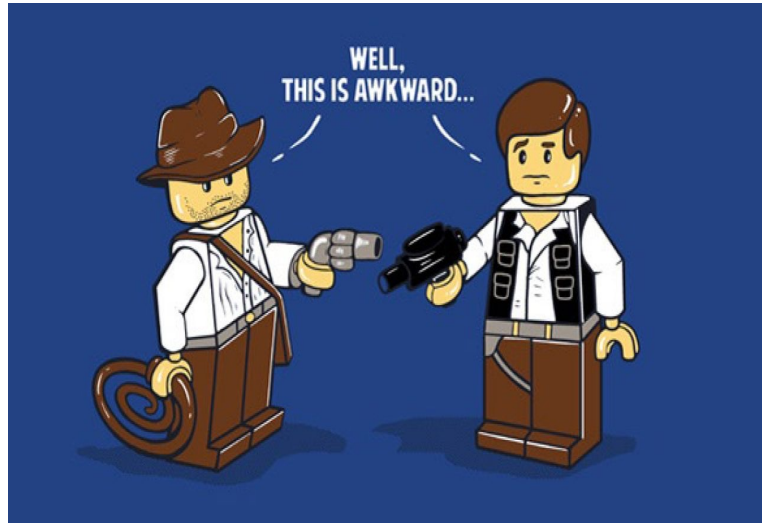
**Waynesboro  
City Charter**

“Except for the purpose of inquiry, the council and its members shall deal...solely through the city manager, and neither the council nor any member thereof shall give orders to any of the subordinates of the city manager...” “Any such orders or other interferences...with the city manager, are prohibited.”

**Operating  
Guidelines/Code  
of Ethics**

NONE

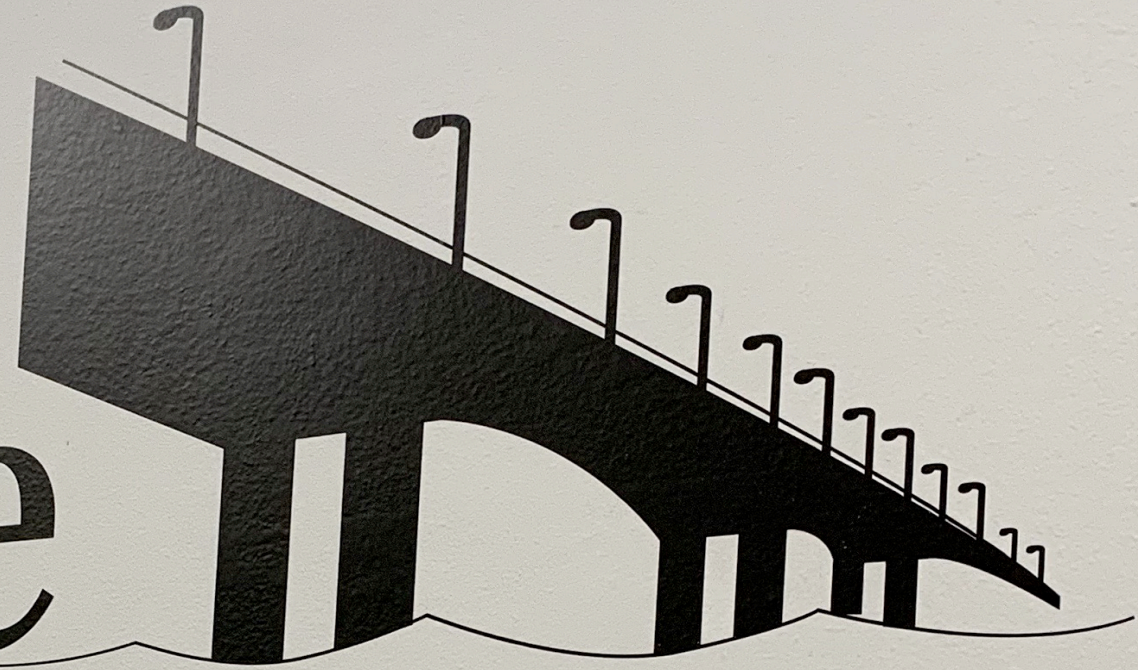
# Outcome



# Summary

- Bridging the gap is essential
- Role of translator/bridge builder is critical
- Good politics is about prioritizing values, not right answers – stories matter (convey values)
- Do not ignore any value over time; it will come back to haunt you
- Democratic process is “messy”
- Politics/administration = ways of thinking
- Aligning governing body/staff expectations is crucial
- Know the difference between “representative” and “trustee”
- Use Guideposts to help resolve value conflicts

# *Be the Bridge*



*Problems become opportunities when the right people join together.*

Cary, North Carolina