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Learning the Ropes: A case study of the onboarding process for newly elected city councilors

Casey T. Gilbert

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LEARNING THE ROPES: ONBOARDING CITY COUNCILORS

**LEARNING THE ROPES: A CASE STUDY OF THE ONBOARDING PROCESS
FOR NEWLY ELECTED CITY COUNCILORS**

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Public Policy

Advisory Committee:

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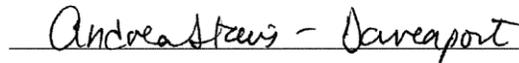
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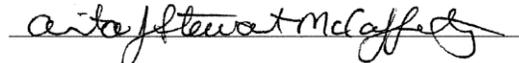
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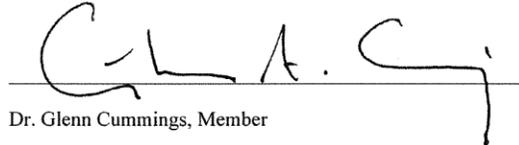
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LEARNING THE ROPES: ONBOARDING CITY COUNCILORS

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An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
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Locally Elected Officials (LEOs) face a steep learning curve when assimilating to their new roles on municipal councils. Their skills and experience prior to being elected often do not align with the skills required, such as municipal budgeting, navigating intricate government processes, and handling a broad range of constituent feedback. While some training is available through organizations such as the National League of Cities and state Municipal Associations, typically, the newly elected official only receives a brief orientation before they must vote on council business.

In the private sector, onboarding is a proven process for assimilating new leaders, reducing the learning curve, and minimizing mistakes. Companies like L'Oréal lead the way with programs that ensure talent retention and help new members become effective in their role. Onboarding is now appearing in the lexicon of nonprofit boards and in local government. Yet, there is still a tremendous gap in the depth and breadth of onboarding provided to locally elected officials and a gap in the research that documents this process.

I address the gap by examining the onboarding perceptions and experiences of city councilors in Eastwood*, a mid-sized city in the northeast United States. Through a

LEARNING THE ROPES: ONBOARDING CITY COUNCILORS

review of the literature, I created an onboarding best-practices elements framework to analyze the onboarding program in Eastwood.

The findings reveal that a comprehensive onboarding program is not in place for the Eastwood Council. However, effective elements of onboarding did include: preparation for the role, relationship building, managing information and communication, and navigating roles, power, and process. Based on their experience, I developed a model for onboarding at the local council level.

I recommended the following policy changes: 1) the City of Eastwood should develop a customized onboarding program for its council; 2) the City of Eastwood should continue to invest in and improve technology that supports the council. Finally, the City of Eastwood should collaborate with similar organizations to develop a training program for locally elected officials. While the findings are uniquely relevant to the Eastwood Council, other local governments can draw on the findings and conclusions to guide their own inquiry and identify improvements for their councils.

**Eastwood is a pseudonym*

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To Dr. Andrea Stairs-Davenport, Dr. Glenn Cummings, and Dr. Anita Stewart McCafferty for their guidance and belief that led to my successful defense. I extend my gratitude to you, my rock star committee, and wish you all the best.

To my parents, David and Dallas Gilbert, who invested in my education and told me that I could achieve anything that I put my mind to, so long as I worked hard and stayed true to myself. Your love and support have always meant the world to me.

To anyone out there wondering if you should take the leap and move boldly toward your dream, I say, go for it. Tomorrow is not promised, so make it happen today.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Tale of Two Councilors ¹

Consider the following scenarios: Councilor Aiza has just won election to the City Council in Silvertown. Councilor Rani has just been elected to the Blueville Council. Neither councilor has ever served in an elected position before. In Silvertown, there is a two-day council orientation. Blueville has adopted best-practices onboarding for its newly elected councilors.

Councilor Aiza

Councilor Aiza walked into Council chambers on her first night as an elected member of the Silvertown council feeling uneasy. Though she had attended the two-day orientation for new councilors the week before, she had not yet finished reading the 250 page printed manual that had been provided in a three-ring binder at the beginning of orientation. Had the information been accessible online, she would have had easy access whether at home, at work, or on her mobile device, and would have had more opportunities to review the materials.

Waste management was a hot topic on the agenda for that evening's council meeting and Councilor Aiza wished that she could remember what the Public Works Director had said about the new recycling carts during the presentation on day-two of orientation, which had included overviews from the city's 14 department heads. It was so hard to keep it all straight. Perhaps she should have called the Public Works Director directly and asked her how she felt about the proposed recycling carts? Were the new recycling carts going to provide cost savings and increased recycling or were they going to be a burden to the Public Works staff that was already short-handed with five positions

¹ Names of people and places in opening vignette are fictitious

currently vacant? It might have been better to ask the Mayor or the City Manager, but she was unsure about the chain of command, so she did not reach out. Arriving at the meeting, Councilor Aiza did not have the complete information that she needed to make a well-informed decision.

Councilor Aiza had drafted an amendment that she felt might improve the recycling cart ordinance, but she couldn't remember if you make the amendment after the original motion is made, after it is seconded, or during discussion. She had heard that Blueville, a nearby city, hosts a mock council meeting before their first official meeting to ensure that the new councilors understand the Council's Rules. Having a practice run would have been helpful. That way, she would have been able to interact with her fellow councilors in a 'judgement-free' setting before she had to sit behind the dais and make official decisions; especially given the additional pressure of being subject to public view and scrutiny.

Also on the council agenda that night was the ordinance proposing an increased minimum wage within city limits. Having exchanged some heated emails with constituents whom she had not met yet in person, Councilor Aiza was feeling uneasy about providing comments on the proposed language. Her friend, Councilor Rani, had recently attended the Municipal Association's training on "Engaging with Constituents" and her fee had been paid through her council's professional development budget. Feeling like she should have used her own personal money to attend the training with her friend Councilor Rani, Councilor Aiza walked into council chambers and avoided eye contact with the audience as she took her seat.

Fumbling the amendment to the recycling cart ordinance, Councilor Aiza was unable to successfully get her amendment passed and, when it came time for the minimum wage ordinance discussion, many from the audience expressed their frustration with her lack of follow-up about their concerns. Councilor Aiza left the council meeting that night feeling like maybe she had made a mistake in wanting to represent her district on the council and that perhaps she wasn't cut out to be a city councilor after all. But first, she was going to call her good friend, Councilor Rani, to hear about her onboarding experience in Blueville.

Councilor Rani

Councilor Rani was recently elected to the City Council in Blueville. As a result of research conducted on Blueville City Council's orientation process, the City developed a comprehensive onboarding program that was available to all newly elected city councilors. The onboarding program, a training and education program designed to reduce the time to proficiency for newly elected city councilors, was customized for the Blueville City Council. On the evening of her first meeting as a new city councilor, Councilor Rani was well-prepared and had already enjoyed many interactions with voters in her district in her new role as an elected official.

To help prepare Councilor Rani for her first council meeting, the executive assistant to the City Manager emailed her a link to the documents that she needed to review prior to the meeting, which included: Robert's Rules of Order, the city's code of ordinances, meeting minutes and video recordings of the past three months' city council meetings, and an organizational chart. The documents were housed in a folder in the customized software program that was accessible to all councilors, which made document

storage and retrieval easy. The software program also sent out automated notifications when new training videos or professional development opportunities became available.

In advance of her first council meeting, Councilor Rani received the packet for the meeting, which was comprehensive and included memos and supporting materials from the various city departments. Should Councilor Rani need to cross-reference the agenda items, she could remotely log-in to the program, which linked to Blueville's municipal data dashboard. The ability to access real-time information enabled Councilor Rani to have accurate statistics on the City's service provision rating and also helped her to identify where improvements could be made. Real-time data, transparent communications, and an understanding of council and staff's role in policy-making empowered Councilor Rani to be proactive, rather than reactive, with regard to constituent requests.

The City Manager, Ms. Jiyun Park, met with Councilor Rani soon after the election to let her know that she has an open-door policy, should Councilor Rani have any questions. As well, Ms. Park was conducting quarterly check-ins with the newly elected Councilors to ensure that they felt comfortable and confident with City processes, and were extended the opportunity to provide any feedback. Councilor Jay, her mentor from a nearby town, was also helping Councilor Rani prepare for her first council meeting.

Having successfully begun training modules from the state's Municipal Association, Councilor Rani understood her duties as a city councilor and was prepared to cast her votes based on data-driven and ethically sound decision-making. Zoning was the hot topic on the agenda for that evening, so Councilor Rani was glad that she had

watched one of the featured videos in the online training portal, “City Zoning 101,” put together by the City’s planning department. Councilor Rani was also looking forward to an upcoming ethics course that she had registered for through the local university, which was partnering with the city to provide additional educational opportunities for locally elected officials throughout the region and state.

Having had both email communication and in-person conversations with several voters in her district, Councilor Rani was sure that she knew how those who supported her in the election felt about the proposed pesticide ordinance up for consideration. As well, she took the initiative to reach out to voters in other districts to ensure that she had a comprehensive view of citizens’ and business owners’ concerns about the proposed ban on pesticides. Also on the council agenda that night was a proposal for a new development, which would require a zoning adjustment.

Councilor Rani felt confident walking into the meeting that she had done her homework, knew how to offer an amendment for the proposed development to enable a zoning adjustment, and that she would support the ban on pesticides. What she didn’t expect was how many citizens would vocalize their support for her during public comment. Many residents saying that they had never had a councilor proactively reach out to them and truly listen to what they had to say. The zoning amendment that she proposed for the new development was accepted unanimously by the Council and the pesticide ban passed with only 1 Councilor opposing the ordinance. Overall, her first Council meeting was a success and she left Council chambers that night feeling excited about the future.

Overview

The opening vignettes paint a picture of two very different experiences for a newly elected local official. Councilor Rani was the beneficiary of a well-designed onboarding program, provided through the City of Blueville, for all newly elected councilors. Blueville's onboarding program began before the Councilor's first official council meeting and integrated mentorship, professional development, understanding the organizational culture, technology, feedback, and ongoing training and educational opportunities. Through the use of a mock council meeting, Councilor Rani was able to practice using Robert's Rules of Order and to interact with fellow councilors, which helped to build her confidence as a leader. Councilor Aiza, newly elected to the Silvertown council, was provided with a two-day orientation, which was an event, as opposed to a process. While the orientation provided an overview of information and expectations, it lacked a comprehensive structure and sufficient timeline for ensuring Councilor Aiza's success as an effective and knowledgeable policymaker.

The expectations of locally elected officials are both broad and constantly increasing (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Thomson, 2010; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). Elected officials are all at once required to be policymakers, financial analysts, proficient orators, and nimble decision-makers. Elected officials come to their elected positions with varied skill sets and backgrounds (Coghill, Donahue & Holland, 2008; Grant, Coghill & Lewis, 2004; Jacob, 1962; Thomson, 2010). In recent years, the city of Eastwood, the city which is the focus of this case study, has recently elected a healthcare professional, a university employee, and a community organizer to its council. So, how are local governments preparing locally elected officials to lead, to be knowledgeable about the myriad issues at hand, and to collectively problem solve? In the private sector,

onboarding is viewed as a critical tool for new hires to gain knowledge, skills, and connections, which in-turn enables them to be more productive, effective, and satisfied members of an organization (Bauer, 2010; Dai & DeMeuse, 2007; Filipkowski, 2016; Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009; Graybill, Carpenter, Offord Jr, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013; Grillo & Kim, 2015; Hillman, 2010; Human Capital Institute, 2018; Laurano, 2012; Muir, 2014; Ndunguru, 2012; Snell, 2006; United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015; Welcome, 2014).

Below, I define onboarding and discuss how onboarding can increase the knowledge, leadership, and decision-making capabilities of policymakers. I will also explain why onboarding would be beneficial for locally elected officials (LEOs) and the communities which they represent. While ensuring that our elected officials are well-versed in areas of public policy and collaborative decision-making, those who stand to gain the most from knowledgeable, effective elected officials are the voters and local citizens themselves, as it is they who will be directly affected by the council's policies. According to Paddock (1996), "The everyday lives of Americans may be more influenced by the decisions of local elected officials and governing bodies than by decisions made at any other level of government" (p. 690). The strength of a city, therefore, lies in its decision-making body.

Statement of the Problem

Locally elected officials are not receiving onboarding best-practices elements. Onboarding, as will be explained below, is essential in ensuring that those who are new to an organization are prepared, integrated, and ready for their new role. Locally elected officials, while professionals in their own right, do not typically come to their new role

with academic or professional experience in government or public policy. Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of local governments are growing increasingly more complex (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Mohr, 1979; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999), which signals the need for onboarding now more than ever. While some training exists for newly elected officials, it does not fully address their true need to enhance their knowledge of policy-making and ensure that they are effective in their role (Coghill, Holland & Donahue, 2008; DeSeve, 2009; Fox & Korris, 2012; Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Mohr, 1979; Schwabe, 1999; Slack, 1990; Thomson, 2010).

Defining Onboarding

Onboarding is a proven model in the private sector for delivering knowledge and training and reducing the time to proficiency for newcomers (Bauer, 2010; Dai & DeMeuse, 2007; Filipkowski, 2016; Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009; Ndunguru, 2012; Snell, 2006; United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015; Welcome, 2014). Through a case study of Eastwood, a mid-sized city in the northeast United States, I describe the council's onboarding process that exists and identify ways to strengthen the existing program.

Mohr (1979) asserts that,

Local Government in the United States has grown consistently more complex, sophisticated, and difficult to manage. Policy-makers -- the mayors, council members, and commissioners -- assume an enormously difficult set of problems when they are sworn into office. Yet, only minimal assistance, if any, is provided to aid policy-makers in developing their leadership and decision-making capabilities. (p. 448)

While written almost forty years ago, policymakers still face the same hurdles today. Although some training does exist for many elected officials, local governments still lack structured, comprehensive onboarding programs, which have been beneficial to the private sector. But what is an onboarding program and how would onboarding increase the knowledge, leadership, and decision-making capabilities of policy-makers? Furthermore, why would onboarding be beneficial for locally elected officials and the communities they represent?

Onboarding can be defined as “the acquiring, accommodating, assimilating, and accelerating of new leaders into the organizational culture and business” (Ndunguru, 2012, p. 6). At its core, onboarding is a learning and development program (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Onboarding is not only a program, but a process that supports individuals by imparting the “knowledge, skills, and behaviors they need to succeed” (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011, p. 51). Simply put, onboarding programs teach the unwritten rules of “how to get things done” (Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009, p. 6), which is an essential skill in the public sector where taxpayer money is on the line and accountability is paramount. In the big picture view, all of the elements of onboarding serve a larger goal, which is to instill a “shared purpose” (Bradt, 2010, p. 5). Onboarding is not a one-way street. Both the individual and the organization are being transformed during the process (Bradt, 2010).

As a learning and development program, onboarding “combines elements of training, experiential learning, mentoring, coaching, 360-degree feedback, and performance feedback” (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Ideally, a successful onboarding program will last three to twelve months (Besson, 2017;

Filipkowski, 2016; Graybill, Carpenter, Offord Jr, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013; Hillman, 2010; Kumar & Pandey, 2017; Ndunguru, 2012; Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010; United States Department of Agriculture, 2017; United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015; Welcome, 2014) and should begin before the employee's first day (Graybill, Carpenter, Offord Jr, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013; Hillman, 2010; Kronos, 2018).

Onboarding elements that begin before the first day are sometimes referred to as "preboarding" (Lahey, 2014).

While organizations, academics, and consulting firms offer different models, the best structure for onboarding is one that is customized and will therefore provide the best outcomes for the organization for which it is being designed (Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009; Grillo & Kim, 2015; Ndunguru, 2012; Paddock, 1996).

In the private sector, onboarding has been gaining attention and momentum as a useful tool for integrating new hires into the company culture to ensure the success of individuals within an organization (Bauer, 2010; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Besson, 2017; Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017; Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; Human Capital Institute, 2018; Hillman, 2010; Lahey, 2014; Laurano, 2012; Ndunguru, 2012; O.C. Tanner, 2008; Pike, 2014). Culture refers to the formal and informal norms and values of an organization (Gabis, 1992). Since its appearance in the corporate vernacular in the 1990's, firms such as McKinsey, Harvard Business Review, and Kronos have been researching and evaluating onboarding best practices to define the keys to success.

An Opportunity for Application in the Public Sector

Local governments and the services they provide are highly visible, as are the elected officials themselves (Paddock, 1996). The everyday lives of citizens are

impacted by decisions made at a local level and the belief is “that government closer to home is better government” (p. 690). With so much at stake, the success of our policymakers is paramount.

Schwabe (1999) asserts that councilors are “overloaded with information and feel they do not have enough knowledge for decision making” (p. 3). As “trustees for the voters”, their job is complicated and demanding because they are “obligated to formulate policies and allocate resources in support of the public good” (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999, pp. 199-200). Parliamentarians face similar hurdles with information overload, which signals that there are shared challenges at all levels of government (Coghill, Donahue, Holland, Richardson, & Neesham, 2009). To further elaborate:

In their effort to learn what is necessary for policy making, elected officials have little institutional or organizational support. Although many states have developed training programs for practicing public administrators and for newly-elected and re-elected state legislators, it appears that similar comprehensive efforts do not exist for local legislators. Relatively poorly-informed elected officials may be making important, sensitive, and potentially far-reaching decisions. (Paddock, 1996, p. 692)

Intentional support and development is critical in helping new leaders build efficacy (Compasspoint, n.d.). While some training does exist for locally elected officials, historically, organizations such as state municipal leagues, professional associations, and higher education institutions have facilitated training and education for local government officials (Coghill, et al., 2009; Paddock, 1996). These programs, while

helpful, should be part of a comprehensive onboarding process and not the sole source of education and training for newly elected officials.

The individuals and organizations that comprise the public sector are motivated to act in a positive way through their commitment to the primary mission, which is to serve the public (McKinsey & Co., 2010). As such, any and all effort that might serve to enhance these motivations, such as increased knowledge, collaborative relationship building, and a better grasp of policies and procedures can only bolster an already committed group of public servants and enhance their effectiveness as a governmental body. According to McKinsey and Co. (2010), “the question of how to drive effective and efficient performance in government is receiving substantial attention around the world today” (p. 20).

Slack (1990) submits that, “training and education needs of local governments are relatively disparate and unique” (p. 397), which offers a real opportunity to take the best-of-the-best practices and customize a program for local governments that can address their unique challenges and highlight their assets. Customized programs, like onboarding, can “increase the level of productivity and thereby enhance [a local government’s] responsiveness to the needs and demands of the citizenry” (Slack, 1990, p. 397). Battaglio (2008) adds that “public service training programs may in fact play a more important role than previously thought in equipping local officials with the tools they need to perform their duties and be more effective actors in the governmental process” (p. 131).

A desire for more training and education exists among LEOs (Fox & Korris, 2012). Thomas (2010) cites a survey conducted by the Institute for Local Government

(IFLG) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn (UMD) in which “eighty five percent of all respondents indicated that ongoing training was important or very important to ensuring effective decision making by local, elected leaders” (p. 438). DeSeve (2009) conducted a survey of Presidential Appointments with Senate Confirmation (PAS) members of the George W. Bush Administration as they prepared for a leadership transition. In the survey, the majority of respondents indicated that “additional orientation and continued training was necessary for effectiveness” (p. 6). At all levels of government, there is a need and a desire for a greater level of training and education. Onboarding is a proven tool to help achieve increased knowledge and effectiveness.

The professions and level of education of city councilors, as well as their business, social, and political skills and interests vary widely (Feld & Lutz, 1972; Jacob, 1962; Paddock, 1999; Plummer, 2002; Van Assendelft, 2008). For example, city budgets both guide and reflect city policies and have very real impacts for individuals, businesses, and the community at large. However many councilors do not have a background in public policy, economics, or finance, yet are expected to understand, analyze, and vote on budgets that include a level of detail and a financial price-tag that is far above and beyond what one might have experienced in their personal and professional life before becoming elected.

To summarize, onboarding is an effective learning and development program (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015) and has been shown to accelerate assimilation, increase individuals’ success in an organization, and communicate an organization’s vision and values. Such programs help the individual to build relationships (Dai & DeMeuse, 2007), which are essential in both the private and public

sector. Onboarding is, therefore, an effective program for instilling practical and cultural knowledge, reducing learning curves to productivity, and ensuring successful integration into a new organization. In the case of city councilors, who must become instant experts on a wide range of areas of public policy, a well-structured onboarding program could enable them to be more effective public servants and therefore, better able to serve the community and its needs.

Purpose of the Study

Training for LEO's has been given little scholarly attention (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Thomas, 2010). However, it is as important to understand the potential applications and benefits in the public sector as it is for the private sector. As Anderson (2017) posits, "Elected officials promise change and public sector leaders are expected to deliver to a timetable that is not their own" (p.1). If the expectation is that locally elected officials are to be knowledgeable and effective policymakers, it is just as crucial to provide the same level of attention to their onboarding as we do our leaders in the private sector.

By describing the onboarding process for newly elected city councilors in Eastwood, a mid-sized city in the northeast United States, I address this gap by adding to the literature, while providing insight into one councils' experience with onboarding.

Research Questions

1. To what degree is an onboarding program offered to newly elected city councilors in Eastwood?
2. What are the implications for local government and policy-making when essential onboarding elements are present or absent?

Significance of the Study

Vogelsang-Coombs and Miller (1999) submit that, “The task of Local Elected Official (LEO) development involves political learning and is a public issue” (p. 199). They eloquently summarize the importance of providing support to LEOs, “Because LEOs work in changing and highly charged political environments, their need to learn is high; despite the barriers, the cost of their not learning is even higher” (p. 201).

What is at stake if locally elected officials, such as city councilors, do not get the proper training? As discussed in the statement of the problem, city councilors have an immense responsibility and are entrusted with creating policies that affect every resident. They are charged with making decisions on how to allocate taxpayer dollars towards a wide range of programs and services. Demands on councilors are intense and they are subject to constant public scrutiny (Weston & Darke, 2004). As stewards of taxpayer money and creators of their city’s futures, it is in the best interest of the electorate for locally elected officials to have the most comprehensive training available.

Research has shown that onboarding is effective in the private sector for decreasing the time it takes for a newcomer to be an effective and productive member of an organization (Bauer, 2010; Dai & DeMeuse, 2007; Filipkowski, 2016; Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009; Muir, 2014; Ndunguru, 2012; Snell, 2006). Additionally, “firms that have embraced onboarding look beyond initial orientation and view integration of new employees as a strategic means to improve organizational performance” (Wright, 2012, p. 7). For municipal governments, who are ultimately accountable to the taxpayer, performance and efficiency are of the utmost importance.

Hence, there is a need to examine the presence of onboarding programs within the public sector and find ways to encourage local governments to adopt this practice.

An opportunity exists to examine the presence of onboarding programs for locally elected officials, especially given the gap in academic research in this field of study. While Coghill, et al. (2009) provided great insights into the experience of parliamentarians, there is still a large gap in qualitative analysis of councilors' experiences as they transition from resident and into the role of newly elected official. Grenier and Mévellec (2016) reiterate the lack of attention given to training newly elected officials in Quebec, "In this paper, we have explored an understudied measure in the sphere of municipal governance, namely training programs dedicated to newly elected local officials" (p. 8).

Elected officials, who have been the beneficiaries of training and education programs, emphasized how crucial the programs were to accessing specific knowledge and to providing them with the confidence to be effective leaders and public servants. For example, locally elected officials who completed the Local Officials Leadership Academy at Cleveland State University Levin College of Urban Affairs experienced dramatic gains in leadership skills and reduced performance gaps (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). When asked in a follow-up survey "How did your behavior change as a leader because of the Academy?," a council-woman responded with the following,

I am much more careful in decision-making. I listen more and I am able to be more creative with compromise. I also have a stronger authority. I feel people respect me more. I am making more intelligent decisions. I have so many tools

to fall back on from the Academy. I have much better communication abilities. I also have found more resources for information. (p. 206)

Thomas (2010) so eloquently outlines the case best,

Intuitively, there is a great need for training provided to local, elected officials. The chief executives and legislators in municipal and county governments across the United States are primarily part-time volunteers with no specialized education or training in public affairs. They juggle the demands of everyday life and work with the increasingly complicated and often fractious demands of a part-time position in elected office. When they enter office, many have great passion, sincere intentions, and knowledge of their chosen careers. However, their knowledge on matters of local governance often needs development. This includes understanding how their communities contribute to and are affected by broader trends impacting their regions; how various levels of government interface with one another; and the fundamental powers and responsibilities of local government and its elected leaders. Many do not fully appreciate the complexities of the need to develop new knowledge and skills until after they take the oath of office. Indeed, it is unrealistic to expect elected leaders to have mastered the skills and knowledge necessary for effective governance when they enter office, given the array of issues that they must address and the reality that most of their formalized education and experience has focused on their full-time professions outside of government. However, if this deficit in skills and knowledge is not addressed once leaders are elected, poor governance and

ineffective government can result. Society can ill afford such consequences. (pp. 437-438)

Academic research in the field of onboarding as it pertains to locally elected officials (LEOs) contributes to its quality as a field of practice. A case study of a mid-sized city council in the northeast United States reveals the challenges faced by newly elected councilors in obtaining the knowledge and skills needed to be effective policymakers and highlights opportunities for implementing a customized onboarding process.

Definition of Key Terms

Locally Elected Official (LEO)

For the purposes of this study, I define locally elected official (LEO) as an individual who is elected to a municipal or town council. Locally elected official can also be applied more broadly, to elected members of school boards or other municipal bodies. State legislators can also be included in this definition, as will be demonstrated in the literature review. While I do generally consider all of these individuals to be locally elected officials, the purpose of this case study is to better understand the onboarding practices that are present or absent in local councils. As such, I will adhere to the more narrow definition for the purposes of this particular piece of research.

Onboarding versus Orientation

An important distinction is the difference between onboarding and orientation. Orientation is transactional, focusing on paperwork, while onboarding is strategic in nature and maximizes employee engagement and retention (Welcome, 2014). Whereas orientation is an event that lasts for only one or two days (Georgia State University, 2018;

Lewkovich, 2017), onboarding is a process that should last, ideally, between three and twelve months (Filipkowski, 2016; Kumar & Pandey, 2017; United States Department of Agriculture, 2017; United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015; Welcome, 2014). Orientation, while not onboarding, is a part of the onboarding process (Wright, 2012).

Onboarding versus Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization is both a part of the onboarding process (Graybill, Carpenter, Offord Jr, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013; Pike, 2014; Zenefits, 2018) and a result of a successful onboarding program. According to Chao, et al., (1994), “organizational socialization is concerned with the learning content and process by which an individual adjusts to a specific role in an organization” (p. 730). The focus is on the individual’s personal experience (Klein, Polin & Sutton, 2015).

Organizational socialization focuses on person-organization fit (Pike, 2014) and on establishing networks of people and channels of information, whereas onboarding identifies the process through which facilitation of those networks can become more robust. Klein, Polin, and Sutton (2015) submit that “onboarding is used by organizations to expedite socialization” (p. 263) however, it is also commonplace to see organizational socialization used interchangeably with onboarding (Bauer, 2010; Graybill, Carpenter, Offord Jr, Piorun, & Shaffer, 2013). Onboarding is, as stated above, a learning and development program, which incorporates orientation, organizational socialization, and if done well, can enhance capacity building.

Onboarding versus Induction

Induction is most readily used and referred to in the field of education, pertaining to the training of new teachers (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). In the private and public sectors, induction is treated as an event, similar to orientation (Atkins & Gilbert, 2003; Fox & Korris, 2012; Greenwood & Wilson, 1990), whereas in the field of education, induction is seen as a process. In the private sector and public sector, induction is often used interchangeably with orientation (Martin & Saba, 2008).

Mentorship is a common strategy in teacher induction programs (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000) and new educators are often paired with an established educator for their first year and beyond, while they become comfortable with their new role. Teacher induction also includes elements such as orientation and training and typically spans at least one year (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000).

According to Arends and Rigazio-DiGilio (2000), “the educational reforms of the 1980s produced a spate of beginning teacher induction programs” (p. 1). These induction programs were aimed at increasing teacher satisfaction, acquiring the competence of more experienced teachers, reducing turnover rates and ensuring that the new teachers were “socialized into district and school culture more quickly” (p. 1). Induction, socialization, and onboarding use similar language to describe the processes and also have goals and outcomes in common.

The next chapter is a comprehensive review of the literature on onboarding. I draw examples from the private, nonprofit, and public sector to provide a holistic overview of onboarding. I describe and identify essential components of onboarding. I discuss training that exists for locally elected officials (LEOs) in order to illustrate the parallels between the needs of private sector employees and LEOs.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The review of the literature examines how onboarding has evolved as an important tool in the private sector for employee engagement, productivity, and ultimately, improved organizational performance. In this chapter, I describe the role of city councils and councilors to draw parallels between public sector needs and the needs of private sector organizations and private sector employees, with regards to training and education. Highlighting examples of existing training practices of locally elected officials and onboarding in the public sector, I demonstrate how private sector onboarding best-practices are relevant and can be applied to the public sector, with specific regard to locally elected officials.

Onboarding

Onboarding is a relatively new term, gaining popularity in the 1990's. Different from orientation, onboarding is a process that can last up to a year (Filipkowski, 2016), while orientation is often a single-day event (Lewkovich, 2017). Onboarding begins before the newcomer's first day of work, a term often referred to as 'pre-boarding' (Fahey, 2019).

Douglas (2018) defines onboarding as "the process of transforming a new hire into a fully functioning, integrated member of the team" (p. 1). The process is intentional (Hillman, 2010; Muir, 2014) and "helps new hires adjust to the social and performance aspects of their jobs so they can quickly become productive, contributing members of the organization" (Bauer, 2010, p. v).

Elements of Onboarding

While the specific elements of an onboarding program may vary from organization to organization, key elements, such as understanding the organizational

culture, feedback, making introductions to key people, mentoring, the use of technology, and providing opportunities for professional development are considered best practices.

Each of these elements is further expanded upon below.

The first impressions of the company and its culture “should be viewed as a critical means to establish a relationship with the new employee and set him or her up for success by introducing skills and behaviors that are expected within the organization” (Besson, 2017, p. 1). Understanding the “fundamental culture and values of an organization” can help an individual “connect with the broader purpose of the organization and gives them a better sense of fit within the company as a whole” (Pike, 2014, p. 3). Feedback should be gathered by the people or department overseeing the onboarding from day one, with regular check-ins throughout the length of the process (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017; Douglas, 2018; Filipkowski, 2016; Lahey, 2014; O.C. Tanner, 2008).

Introductions to co-workers and key people are essential in order to make the newcomer feel welcome, integrated, and so that they know who to go to with questions (Bauer, 2010; Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017; Douglas, 2018; Lahey, 2014; Muir, 2014; National Council of Nonprofits, 2018). Mentoring, or even a ‘buddy’, can also ease the transition into a new role in an organization (Filipkowski, 2016; Martin & Saba, 2008; National Council of Nonprofits, 2018; USDA, 2017; Zenefits, 2018).

Technology can play an important role in streamlining the onboarding process, making it more user-friendly, and engaging (Booz, Allen, Hamilton, 2008; Lahey, 2014).

In addition to replacing paper forms with digital files, the use of technology can also

extend to training videos, surveys, and tracking onboarding to-do lists (Lahey, 2014).

Investing in technology is considered an onboarding best practice (Laurano, 2012).

Learning and development, which is the essence of onboarding, should be a focus. Building in opportunities for professional development and continuing education is a critical investment in the individual's success in the organization, with the results being increased productivity and stronger engagement (Lahey, 2014).

Documented Benefits of Onboarding

The importance of onboarding, from the perspective of the private sector, is that it is good for the new employee, and it benefits the employer. With more than 89% of new hires indicating that they did not have the “optimum level of knowledge and tools necessary to do their job” (O.C. Tanner, 2013, p. 2), this signals the opportunity for a structured onboarding program that would bridge the gap and deliver the required knowledge. According to Fast Company, well-structured onboarding results in higher employee retention rates (O.C. Tanner, 2008). In a white paper published by O.C. Tanner (2008), a company that develops strategic employee recognition and rewards solutions, some additional benefits of onboarding include performance acceleration, decreasing time-to-productivity, and instilling trust in the manager and team.

Top companies lead the field in offering strategic onboarding that lasts well into the new recruits' first year, in many cases, spanning a full twelve months (Booz, Allen, Hamilton, 2008; O.C. Tanner, 2008; Welcome, 2014). The results are not just anecdotal; companies are doing the research and measuring their success. After PricewaterhouseCoopers rolled out their onboarding program called “Turning Point”, 91% of the employees enrolled said they intended to stay at PwC for at least another year,

compared to 78% in the control group (O.C.Tanner, 2008). Ohio Savings Bank reduced their company-wide turnover rate to 16.8%, which is almost half of the industry average, within five months of launching their new onboarding program (O.C.Tanner, 2008).

Another example of a successful company that offers a customized onboarding program is L'Oréal. The two-year, six-part integration program, titled "L'Oréal Fit", includes training and roundtable discussions, meetings with key insiders, on-the-job learning supported by management, individual mentoring and HR support, and field and product experiences such as site visits and shadowing programs (Bauer, 2010). The bottom line is that organizations who implement formal onboarding programs are more effective (Bauer, 2010; Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Wright, 2012).

In "Researching Onboarding Best Practice", Alice Snell (2006) identifies "four components that are critical for the design and management of a successful onboarding process: (1) Process analysis; (2) Implementation; (3) Integration; and (4) Reporting" (p. 34). In its Executive Order Guidance (2015), the Senior Executive Service of the Federal Government of the United States of America outlines the "four phases of an ongoing cycle to achieve a successful executive onboarding program: planning, implementation, evaluation, and revision/enhancement" (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015, p. 2). Bauer (2010) offers four "distinct levels" of onboarding, the "Four C's: Compliance, Clarification, Culture, and Connection" (p. 2). Besson (2017) suggests that effective onboarding should include three components: creating connections, integrating into culture, and providing clarity on role. While Welcome (2014), offers these three essential components: "address people needs (create opportunities for new employees to build relationships); organizational needs (help them learn about the organization and

how they fit in it); and resources and support needs (provide processes, procedures, policies, resources, and tools to help them do their job)” (p. 1).

Though the categories or descriptors may differ, the goals are the same; ensuring that the new hire is provided opportunities to build relationships, gaining a deeper understanding of the culture of the organization, and imparting comprehensive knowledge of how the organization operates and the tools available to help the individual to become an effective contributor. Most importantly, the variation in approach underscores the importance of customizing an onboarding program to suit the organization for which it is being developed.

Formal onboarding is becoming more widely adopted in the private sector. Aberdeen Group, a technology and services company, reported that only 24% of the companies in their study indicated that they did not implement or did not plan to implement an onboarding initiative in 2006, versus 60% of companies in 2005 (Aberdeen Group, 2006; Dai & DeMeuse, 2007), which illustrates the growing use of onboarding as an essential tool for organizational integration.

When it comes to individual skill-building, onboarding expedites an individual’s “contribution to optimizing strategic achievement” and “provides a fast track to meaningful, productive work” (Ndunguru, 2012, p. 6). High-performing organizations use effective onboarding strategies to assimilate their leaders quickly and strategically (Ndunguru, 2012; United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Onboarding programs are not a ‘one size fits all,’ but must be customized both to the organization and to the individual (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Effective onboarding programs increase performance of the individual/employee and accelerate

learning curves (Bauer, 2010; Booz, Allen, Hamilton, 2008; Filipkowski, 2016; Laurano, 2012; Snell, 2006). Onboarding also provides an understanding of the organization's culture and values (Byford, Watkins, & Triantogiannis, 2017; Cable, Gino, & Staats; 2013; Ndunguru, 2012; Pike, 2014). Organizational culture can be defined as the organization's shared values, norms, and beliefs (Gabris, 1992).

On the ground level, onboarding provides a roadmap which helps an individual understand the daily functions of an organization (Pike, 2014). Onboarding programs act as support systems for individuals as they navigate their way in a new organization and in the long-term, successful onboarding contributes to leadership retention (Ndunguru, 2012). A benefit for the organization itself is that onboarding promotes sustained organizational success (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015).

A measurable benefit is that onboarding minimizes mistakes, which can be costly (Bauer, 2010). Mistakes in both the private and public sectors can bear a huge financial cost and, in some cases, a very human cost. According to the Tribune Business News, a 2012 report from the state Auditor's Office in Washington state found that most of the "open government" related violations or concerns "could have been avoided with sufficient training and knowledge" (Walla Walla Union Bulletin, March 2014).

Whether in the private or public sector, individuals are coming into their roles lacking knowledge. A review of onboarding research by O.C.Tanner (2014) cites a survey by Aberdeen Group in which 89% of new hires indicated that they did not have the "optimum level of knowledge and tools necessary to do their job" (p. 2). Schwabe (1999) observed of the Stuttgart City Council that "many council members are ill-

prepared” and “are both overloaded with information and feel they do not have enough knowledge for decision-making” (pp. 1-3).

Nonprofit organizations suffer from lack of effective onboarding as well, with nearly half of nonprofit leaders, such as Executive Directors or CEOs, reporting that they received little or no help from their boards when they began their new positions with the organization (Walsh, Landles-Cobb, & Karlins, 2014). In the nonprofit sector, onboarding is used not only to describe how a CEO is welcomed by the board of directors, but also how new board members are integrated into the organization. Onboarding “sets the tone” for the board member’s tenure, enables them to “start making an impact sooner”, and sets the individual and board up for “success” (Muir, 2014, p. 1). For seasoned leaders, transitioning into a new role poses challenges (Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009). A potential pitfall in not providing adequate training is that, “leaders who take action in the absence of a solid understanding of the organizational culture, a well-developed network, and/or a clear grasp of the nuances of their new leadership role are prone to political and interpersonal missteps” (p. 5). According to a survey conducted by Bridgespan Group, a global nonprofit, nearly half of the 214 nonprofit executives surveyed reported getting little to no help from their boards when first taking on the position (Walsh, Landles-Cobb, & Karlins, 2014). Onboarding has applications in the private, nonprofit, and public sectors as each prepare individuals for important responsibilities and, in many cases, leadership roles.

As I will discuss below, the knowledge and skills required to be an effective policymaker are ever-increasing. Some local governments are rising to the challenge to help address the skills and knowledge gap, but there is still more that can be done.

The Role of City Councils

Generally speaking, city councils are a local collective decision-making body (Schwabe, 1999) and are “concerned with improving capacity in the area of service delivery as well as with improving the internal operations of city hall” (Slack, 1990, p. 402). The Texas Municipal League (2015) notes that “City councilmembers are the city’s legislators, and their primary role is policy making.” As “policy makers, it is the council’s responsibility to identify the needs of the citizens and to formulate a plan to meet those needs” (p. 5). Vogelsang-Coombs (2001) submits that “a council that governs well is the epitome of democracy” (p. 43).

Ideally, the council formulates policy, while the staff provides policy alternatives and implements the chosen policy (Gabris, 1992). As a public servant, the councilor acts as both a spokesperson and representative for their district (Svara, 2002) and are the “visible symbol of government” (Mohr, 1979, p. 454). The municipalities which they serve, “provide mechanisms for policy analysis, goal setting, decision making, organizational development, and program implementation” (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005, p. 1151).

Expectations of councilors are high, according to the Texas Municipal League (2015), as “Citizens look to the city council to exercise authority to preserve and promote their health, safety, and welfare. A city council may enact ordinances and resolutions and use its governmental powers for the public good. Citizens expect their city council to provide leadership in addressing issues” (p. 6). Decisions are more difficult to make when decision-making happens in the public eye (Weston & Darke, 2004).

In addition to policymaking, councilors have many other duties. According to the National League of Cities (nlc.org), council members may be responsible for performing the following functions:

- Review and approve the annual budget;
- Establish long- and short-term objectives and priorities;
- Oversee performance of the local public employees;
- Oversee effectiveness of programs;
- Establish tax rates;
- Enter into legal contracts;
- Borrow funds (i.e. bonds);
- Pass ordinances and resolutions;
- Modify the city's charter;
- Regulate land use through zoning laws;
- Regulate business activity through licensing and regulations;
- Regulate public health and safety;
- Exercise the power of eminent domain;
- Communicate policies and programs to residents;
- Respond to constituent needs and complaints; and
- Represent the community to other levels of government.

(<https://www.nlc.org/city-councils>)

In addition to this list of responsibilities, there are also leadership qualities that are important for a city leader to possess. In 'A Guide to Becoming a City Official', the Texas Municipal League (2015) identifies the following as desirable leadership attributes:

- a general understanding of city government
- willingness to learn about a wide range of topics
- integrity
- consistency
- confidence
- dedication to the interests of citizens and the community as a whole
- strong communication and team-building skills, including being a good listener
- openness to the thoughts and ideas of others
- being approachable and accessible
- willingness to work cooperatively with others. (p. 5)

Grenier and Mévellec (2016) noted that municipalities are being both provided and burdened with more responsibility and power, which “is increasing the political roles afforded to municipalities in Canada and, concurrently, the role of LEOs in strategic political decision-making in areas such as economic development, transportation and urban planning” (p. 38). In Adelaide, South Australia, for example, property development is both a major activity and a continuous source of revenue for the City (Mosler, 2011). Vogelsang-Coombs (2001) notes “besides its complexity, the job of a council is laden with controversies, conflicts, and cross pressure” (p. 43).

The roles and responsibilities of locally elected officials are growing increasingly more complex, which underscores the need for professional training (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Thomson, 2010).

Training for Local Elected Officials (LEOs)

As highlighted in the purpose statement, training for LEO's has been given little scholarly attention (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016; Thomas, 2010). In other words, while some training does exist, little academic research has been done to identify local governments that utilize training for LEOs and to what extent. Another area in which little is known is how training programs impact the communities served by the LEOs. Simply put, how can we start to measure or quantify the outcomes of providing training to LEOs?

Orientation is a standard practice in welcoming newly elected officials and most state municipal leagues offer opportunities for continuing education. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that orientation and the availability of continuing education does not equate to an onboarding program that is built upon best-practices. While many newly elected officials receive some training, it is often focused solely on "procedures for passing legislation, the details of the municipal budget, and other information that the staff wants new officeholders to know" (Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999, p. 200).

Greenwood and Wilson (1990) point to the negative externalities in the absence of training, "without a programme of education and development councilors could rapidly become even less effective in shaping policy at a local level" (p. 31). Furthermore, they submit, "Training is increasingly being presented as an essential contribution towards better equipping local authority politicians to play an active part in the formulation and implementation of council policy" (p. 32).

There have been attempts to collect and describe the range of training available to LEOs in the United States. In 1996, Susan Paddock examined "training offered by municipal leagues, professional associations, and universities" (p. 689) in "a sample of

states, associations, and universities across the country,” which “were selected to represent geographical, demographic, and political diversity” (p. 692). Paddock concluded that,

It may seem an impossible task to provide appropriate training. Building collaborative relationships between the leagues, universities, and professional associations will make it less challenging. Done appropriately, such a training approach can support municipal elected officials who have the greatest potential for changing government. Such training may be the key which unlocks the door to better relations between bureaucrats and politicians, which sparks creative thinking about new ways to solve growing, pressing problems, and which leads, therefore, to better government. (p. 705)

Battaglio Jr’s (2008) evaluation focused solely on university-based trainings in the southeast, highlighting training available for LEOs in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Battaglio concluded that “the training efforts described here may play an important role in ensuring that local elected officials have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to govern more effectively” (p. 131).

The subject of LEO training entered the public policy spotlight in the 1970s when faculty at the Institute of Government at the University of Georgia “realized the gap in training being provided to local government people” (Mohr, 1979, p. 450). While staff and managers were offered training programs, little was offered to the elected policymakers. In response, a grant was funded under Title I of the Higher Education Act:

The objectives of the program were:

1. To design a training program that will aid city councils and commissions in becoming more efficient policy-making bodies;
2. To provide information to local governing bodies that will assist them in understanding and utilizing techniques of group processes and decision-making;
3. To offer more information to individual elected officials and elected groups as teams on the dynamics and characteristics of leadership; and
4. To develop a basic training design for elected governing bodies that has transferability with a minimum of change from one community to another. (pp. 450-451)

Wright (1975) asserts that a principal step in capacity building should be to “create the conditions required to make policy makers...more acutely aware of the purposes of governments and how achievements can be evaluated” (p. 751). In other words, it is incumbent upon governments to provide training and education for elected officials, so that they can more easily fulfill their role and duties to the public. Mohr (1979) concluded similarly,

There may well be no more critical need than to enhance the decision-making skills of men and women who must deal with conflicting demands and conflicts between the real capabilities of cities to act and the demand of citizens. It is to this end that research, time, money and energy must be devoted to improve the quality of decision-making at the local government level in the best interest of this country. (p. 457)

Decades later, these sentiments continue to be echoed, as the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development states in a report published in 2002 that “there

is an increasing recognition of the importance of training councillors to perform their role effectively” (Plummer, 2002, p. 12). While some progress has been made, Norton (2016) notes that “the bottle of parliamentary training may no longer be empty, but it has a long way to go before being anywhere near full” (p. 196). Further affirming the similarities in needs at all levels of government for training and support of newly elected officials.

Not only is training important, but it delivers some very real, measurable results. In a study of 36 locally elected officials who completed the Local Officials Leadership Academy at Levin College between 1993 and 1998, Vogelsang-Coombs and Miller (1999) found that,

1. Alumni experienced personal growth that strengthened their competence and the confidence to lead;
2. Newly elected officials accelerated learning about their office;
3. Experienced LEOs felt rejuvenated and renewed their commitment to public service;
4. LEOs reported a greater willingness to cooperate with others;
5. LEOs used their new learning to interact comfortably with their community and to achieve organizational results;
6. LEOs learned to frame their actions in a broader context;
7. LEOs participated in new governance relationships and made the region more vital; and
8. LEOs who attended the academy encouraged others to learn. (pp. 205-209)

While the Leadership Academy (<http://www.csuohio.edu/urban/prof-dev/leadership-academy>) still exists today, it has expanded its scope to include “nonprofit administrators and aspiring leaders” in addition to the traditional appointed and elected officials for which it was originally designed. Many states have leadership programs, where leaders from all over the state come together to learn and work on problem-solving to better their communities and states. While these programs could serve as a component of an onboarding program for newly elected officials, they are not a substitute for customized and comprehensive onboarding for locally elected officials.

A Sampling of Training Programs for LEOs

Following is a broad stroke of exemplars of various training programs for locally elected officials (LEOs). Highlighted are programs and practices of states and municipalities, which serve to demonstrate what training for LEOs looks like today.

In South Carolina, The Institute of Government for County Officials offers a full day of orientation training for newly elected county council members, as well as two levels of certifications. A sampling of Level I courses include: Orientation to County Government, Ethical Leadership and Public Service, Planning and Land Use, and Public Budgeting. Level II Courses include: Economic Development, Financial Management, and Measuring and Reporting County Performance (South Carolina Association of Counties, 2014). While the Institute’s training does not represent a comprehensive onboarding program, the certifications and training could be a part of an elected official’s complete onboarding program and is certainly an exemplar for professional, accessible training in partnership with a local university. In this case, the Institute partners with both the College of Charleston and the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and

Public Affairs at Clemson University to add academic rigor and professionalism to the training.

The Vinson Institute in Georgia offers the Newly Elected Municipal Officials Institute (NEMOI), which is one of several other programs aimed at providing education and training including leadership development, to elected officials (Battaglio, 2008). In Indiana, the Indiana Association of Towns and Cities (IACT) holds ‘newly elected official seminars’, which are offered before newly elected officials take oath (Ladyga-Block, 2007). The seminars are a nod to the ‘pre-boarding’ component of onboarding, since they are offered prior to when the LEOs begin their official service. As well, the IACT provides training via legislative conferences, legislative district meetings, and the Municipal Management Institute. The Association of Indiana Municipalities (AIM) also has a 200-page training guide ‘The Indiana Elected Municipal Officials Handbook’, which is free when you register for boot camp (Accelerate Indiana Municipalities, n.d.). AIM’s statement of purpose is “To foster, promote and advocate for the success of Hoosier municipalities as laboratories of innovation, hubs of talent and the engines driving our state’s economy” (Accelerate Indiana Municipalities, n.d.).

In 2010, Thomson conducted a meta-analysis and found that “a large number of programs have emerged to enhance the knowledge of local, elected officials on the fundamentals of local government, leadership, basic services, and professionalism” (p. 421). Thomson (2010) also found that “the largest share of programs is targeted to municipal elected officials, who generally have more formal powers and, consequently, more diverse training needs than either township or county officials” (p. 431). Demand from LEOs is a driver of the growth in training programs, as their roles and expectations

are increasingly more complex. In addition to a demand from LEOs, there is also another factor at play in the growth in training programs being offered, which is that more states are requiring training for newly elected LEOs.

As an example, the state of Washington now mandates training for elected officials (Walla-Walla Union Bulletin, 2014). The Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) which serves all 281 cities and towns in Washington State, offers a variety of training and education programs for elected officials (mrsc.org). Newly elected officials in Washington are required to complete Public Records Act (PRA) and Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) training. In addition to the required trainings, MRSC (<http://mrsc.org/Home/Training.aspx>) offers educational opportunities such as, Finance 101 for Elected Officials, Leading Change: A Human-Centered Approach, and Effective Local Leadership: How to Move Initiatives Forward and Get Things Done.

In Quebec, Canada the *Union des municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), offers a ‘Training Program for Newly Elected Officials’, which was recently revamped. In 2010, the Government of Quebec adopted the Municipal Ethics and Good Conduct Act, which requires LEO’s to engage in training programs that provide ethics-based content. In addition to Quebec, seven of the eleven Canadian provinces and territories offer technical training to LEOs (Grenier & Mévellec, 2016).

Grenier and Mévellec (2016) conducted a case study of the UMQ’s introductory training program for new LEO’s and concluded, “we should analyze the broader effects that these training programs have on the municipal political landscape and on LEOs’ collective mandates,” and “accordingly, these dimensions require more attention at the local level from scholars and practitioners interested in the transformations in local

governance in Canada and beyond” (p. 49). The case is being made for investing in training for locally elected officials and in research to measure the outcomes.

Applying Onboarding in the Public Sector

Individuals who are transitioning into a new role need training, whether in the private, nonprofit, or public sector. In the previous section, I highlighted public sector organizations and elected bodies, who are making gallant attempts at providing training to employees and elected officials. Following are additional public sector examples, which demonstrate the feasibility of adapting or adopting a customized onboarding program for local governments.

As of 2015, the United States Government was on the forefront of establishing a well-designed onboarding program with very specific goals. Though the program focused on Senior Level Executive staff in the Federal government, rather than elected officials, the 2015 Executive Order from President Obama demonstrates a thoughtful approach to onboarding design in the public sector. A twelve-month long process, with four goals – 1) understanding the organization's culture, 2) understanding their performance expectations, 3) having access to influential networks, and 4) feeling valued and supported by leadership -- the program aims high in assimilating and ensuring success of its senior leaders (United States Office of Personnel Management, 2015). Additionally, the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences released a research report in 2009, which called for the US Army to consider a comprehensive onboarding program for improving Senior Leader Transitions (Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009).

An example of a city that is taking the lead on public sector employee onboarding is Redmond, Washington. In Redmond, onboarding was identified as essential for new hires. In a report to council, Mellody Matthes, the LEAN Team Sponsor and the city's Human Resources Director, outlined a six-month program for new hires that would rely heavily on technology to eliminate the paper waste usually created during orientation and training. In addition to communications being sent via email, new employees would have access to informational videos and interactive web-based applications. As well, the onboarding process would incorporate individual and group training, and tours of city facilities (redmond.gov).

As a result of information gathered through a survey of current councilors, the city of Centennial, Colorado recognized the need to improve their new council onboarding. The survey invited the current councilors to indicate what information and training they wanted when assuming their new role. In addition, the staff of Centennial conducted research to identify what other municipalities were offering their elected officials in the way of onboarding. As a result, they incorporated into their annual calendar mock council meetings, as well as weekly "Friday Focus" meetings in order to provide ongoing training and education to the council. Other educational opportunities included city tours, ride-alongs with Public Works, and even a 'Jeopardy-style' quiz on municipal government. The feedback from councilors was overwhelmingly positive. They enjoyed the mock meeting, which gave them a chance to practice parliamentary procedure and they felt that the onboarding process gave them a better understanding of council member's roles and staff's roles. Centennial also adopted 'pre-boarding' as a

best practice and started their communication with newly elected officials within two weeks following the election (Setterlind, 2014).

With an extensive list of responsibilities, it is in the public's interest to ensure that elected officials are prepared and educated on parliamentary procedure, current local policy, city budgets, and general operations. An effective onboarding process for new city councilors could provide a strategic framework through which these goals are realized.

Training and education, which are a part of the onboarding process “can increase the level of productivity and thereby enhance its responsiveness to the needs and demands of the citizenry” (Slack, 1990). Councilors must be responsive to the needs of their constituents, while navigating relationships with city staff and fellow councilors. Anderson (2017) emphasizes the importance of these relationships by highlighting the difficulty in navigating complex systems, “The complexities of stakeholder relationships are high for any executive but navigating the informal structures and politics at leadership levels in the public sector requires exceptional savvy” (p. 1).

The examples provided are just a sampling of efforts being made by the public sector to intentionally integrate onboarding into their organization's best practices. However, ample opportunity remains to improve the development and implementation of onboarding programs for local governments and the elected officials that are charged with thoughtful and informed policymaking. With the benefits of onboarding readily transferable to the public sector, a case can easily be made for local governments to embrace onboarding as a way to welcome and integrate newly elected officials.

As the literature review reveals, onboarding best-practices elements include: pre-boarding, orientation, feedback, technology, mentoring, understanding the culture, introductions to key people, and professional development. Onboarding is a process that lasts up to a year and begins before the newcomers' first day. Benefits of onboarding include: promoting sustained organizational success, minimizing mistakes, reducing learning curves, contributing to leadership retention, and increasing newcomers' knowledge. Customization of an onboarding program is essential, as organizations have different needs, as do the newcomers which they are welcoming aboard.

While research on onboarding is increasing in the private sector, the public sector lags behind. Not only is the research on onboarding in the private sector lacking, but so is the design and implementation of onboarding programs for locally elected officials. The two biggest challenges for implementing onboarding programs for municipal councils include time and money. Prioritizing investments in onboarding in already tight budgets is difficult, as is finding the time for additional training for elected officials who are stretched thin.

In the following chapter, I provide a methodological overview of the case study of the Eastwood Council. I discuss the research context, the process of data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to the Study

As we learned in the previous chapter, onboarding is a proven process for integrating newcomers into an organization, reducing the time to proficiency, and increasing retention rates. While the public sector has not fully embraced onboarding, there is evidence that newly elected officials want additional training and support. In many towns and cities, there are training opportunities available for locally elected officials (LEOs) but training alone will not provide the myriad benefits offered by a customized onboarding program. While there is ample private sector research that points to the benefits of onboarding, little is known about its potential applications in the public sector, specifically as it pertains to newly elected city councilors. Therefore, a concentrated effort to better understand public sector applications will serve to fill the gap and add to this area of inquiry.

The purpose of this case study is to describe the onboarding process for newly elected councilors in Eastwood, a mid-sized city in the northeast United States. Through qualitative interviews with current and former city councilors and executive staff, I collected a rich description of the councilors' perspectives and experiences with regard to the council onboarding process as they transitioned from resident to representative. Using the literature review as my guide, as well as the data gathered from the qualitative interviews, I identified the presence or absence of essential onboarding elements in the current onboarding program in Eastwood. Furthermore, themes emerged that were beyond the scope of best practices onboarding as described in chapter two. From these

discoveries, I updated or adapted my Conceptual Framework which better reflects the unique experience of the councilors in Eastwood.

The overarching research question that I sought to answer was: to what degree is an onboarding program offered to the newly elected councilors? Further, what essential elements of onboarding are present or absent in the current program and how could the onboarding process be improved?

Methodological Overview

Rationale for Qualitative Design

Two unique features of qualitative research, outlined by Rossman and Rallis (2017) are that, “(1) the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted and (2) the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world” (p. 4). A qualitative design is particularly well-suited to case study methodology as “qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 39). Whereas the literature review allows for a broad view of onboarding from a variety of perspectives, the case study allows for greater depth. In this case, I revealed a rich description of the onboarding process for city councilors in Eastwood.

A case study seeks to “understand a larger phenomenon through intensive study of one specific instance” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 81). From Stake (1995), “we study a case when it itself is of very special interest” (p. xi). In this case, the specific instance of very special interest is the onboarding experience of City Councilors in Eastwood, a mid-sized city in the northeast United States. This case study is also particularistic, in

that it focuses “on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). As well, it is intrinsic, as this typology is “undertaken when the researcher is interested in the particular case itself” (Merriam, 2009, p. 48). The onboarding program of this city council is of particular interest to me; as such, a case-study is the ultimate tool for analysis. A reason for choosing a case-study is to “study real-life cases that are in progress so that [the researcher] can gather accurate information not lost by time” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 97).

One of the benefits of a case study approach to research is in its flexibility, which allows for a variety of methods to be employed. Since onboarding is both a program and is implemented via organizational policies, a case study is a good fit for academic inquiry. According to Merriam (2009), “Case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy” (p. 51). The case study of the Eastwood City Council provides for an evaluation of the current onboarding program. The evaluation allows for a rich description of the current process and the literature review acts as a guide to identify the absence and presence of essential onboarding elements. Yin (2018) asserts that, “organizational and managerial processes” are a prime example of a “complex social phenomena”, which are a good choice for a case-study (p. 5). Furthermore, Yin posits that “case study research is an all-encompassing mode of inquiry, with its own logic of design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis” (p. 16). A case study is at once both flexible and rigorous.

Constructivist Paradigm

The purpose of a constructivist, also known as interpretivist, approach to research is to describe, understand, and interpret (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018).

Understanding is gained through the interpretation of subject perceptions. Naturalistic or qualitative in nature, it recognizes that multiple realities exist, which are context-bound (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Therefore, a constructivist framework lends itself well to an area where a gap in research exists.

Using a constructivist framework to guide the case study of a city council's onboarding program, I explored the experiences of newly elected, senior, and past city councilors. In the case study of Eastwood, I discovered the unique realities of the participants, which were bound within the context of the municipal government and constituency that they serve.

When preparing for the interviews, I recognized that I could use the findings of the case-study for program improvement, which is of interest to constructivists:

We believe that a goodly portion of social phenomena consist of the meaning-making activities of groups and individuals around those phenomena. The meaning-making activities themselves are of central interest to social constructionists and constructivists simply because it is the meaning-making, sense-making, attributional activities that shape action (or inaction). (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 113)

Criteria for judging validity is "derived from community consensus regarding what is 'real': what is useful and has meaning (especially meaning for action and further steps) within that community" (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018, p. 113). I approached the research topic with the expectation that I would not only add to this body of research,

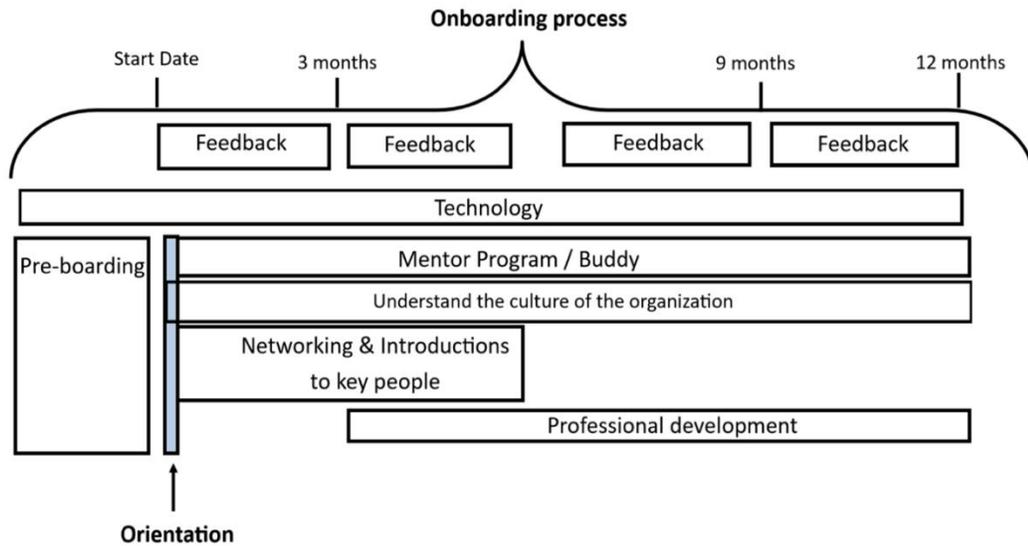
but that my findings would be meaningful to the Eastwood City Council. Furthermore, in providing such a rich description, the possibility exists that the findings might be applied and adapted by other municipalities. I expand on this possibility in more detail in chapter five.

Conceptual Framework - Onboarding Best-Practices Elements

Through the literature review, I developed my Conceptual Framework represented by **Figure 1** *The Essential Elements of Onboarding*, to illustrate the onboarding process and the relationships between the best practices.

Figure 1

The Essential Elements of Onboarding



The best-practices elements include pre-boarding, orientation, feedback, technology, mentoring, understanding the culture, introductions to key people, and professional development. Figure 1 also illustrates where in the onboarding process each of those elements occur: prior to the first day, within the first one to two weeks, within

the first one to three months, ongoing, etc. As the literature review was drawn mainly from private sector research, in my Conceptual Framework it is the organization that is responsible for delivering the elements of the onboarding process to the newcomer.

I used my Conceptual Framework to develop deductive codes and to develop the semi-structured interview questions. Onboarding best-practices elements were tested during the first interview with newly elected councilors in the City of Eastwood to determine the presence or absence of each, based on their perspective of the onboarding process.

Research Context

Setting and Participants

Qualitative research is conducted in “natural settings rather than controlled ones” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 5). City council meetings are open to the public and the councilors themselves are public servants, which makes the setting in this case, not only natural, but very accessible. The setting for this case study is Eastwood, a mid-sized city in the northeastern United States. Eastwood’s Council is comprised of nine members. There are eight city councilors, one from each of the five council districts and three at-large councilors. The Mayor, while not a councilor, is a member of the council and votes as a part of the nine-member body. Each of the five district councilors are elected by the residents and registered voters within their district. All the residents who are registered voters in the city may cast votes for the at-large councilors and may also cast votes for the Mayor.

A participant is defined as “a person from whom case study data are collected, usually through interviews” (Yin, 2018, p. 287). Participants in this case study included

seven current city councilors, as well as one former city councilor. One member of the executive staff, the City Manager, was also interviewed. Case studies seek to capture real-time events in as much detail as possible. The city council's onboarding program is, in this case, the bounded system (Merriam, 2009), with a finite number of individual participants within the case. My case study has seven of the eight currently seated councilors as participants and therefore allows for a complete description of the current program.

A broad, long-range view helped me to identify shifts in onboarding procedures over the years. Many times, changes in municipal staff or leadership results in changes in historical knowledge, policies, and procedures. My criterion for selecting the participants was that they be a current or past city councilor of Eastwood. I included senior councilors who have served several terms, as well as one former councilor. This range of experiences provided me with a historic look at onboarding trends over the years in Eastwood.

The case study is a single case, or within-site, study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The Eastwood City Council site is in the public realm, where entry is possible. My role within a nonprofit organization that has the privilege of interacting with Eastwood Councilors gave me ease of access and allowed for greater depth in the discovery. I discuss this connection further in Role of the Researcher.

Piloting the Interview Protocol

In order to assess the effectiveness of the interview protocol I developed, I scheduled a pilot interview. The participant for the pilot interview was a local town councilor, who does not currently and has not formerly served on the council that is part of this case

study. The pilot interview transcription (See Appendix B) gave me the opportunity to practice the two-tiered coding that I would employ for the case study participant interviews. For the first level of coding, deductive coding, I utilized the onboarding best-practice elements, as illustrated in my Conceptual Framework, as the pre-set codes. The second level of coding, In Vivo coding, revealed themes beyond my Conceptual Framework. The pilot interview also offered additional insights into how to conduct the interviews, being conscious of time, and how to balance taking short-hand notes while remaining focused on the interviewee in order to signal my attention and interest in their answers. In short, the use of a pilot interview was instrumental in fine tuning the interview protocol, in developing interviewing skills, and in gaining insight into the challenges for locally elected officials as they adapt to their new roles.

Data Collection

Methods of data collection used to conduct the case study included in- person interviews with the participants and review of material artifacts. I adapted Seidman's (2013) three-interview methodology to suit this case. While Seidman (2013) uses the three interviews to gather "focused life history", "the details of experience", and "reflection on the meaning" (pp. 21-22), I fully answered the first research question within the bounds of two interviews. I tested the second research question in both interviews, but the data analysis revealed some challenges to forming conclusions about the impacts on public policy in the absence of best-practices onboarding, which I discuss further in Chapter five.

The two interviews utilized open-ended questions and a semi-structured protocol (See Appendix A). Using the literature review as my guide, I developed the following

codes, which also form the foundation of my Conceptual Framework. The codes displayed in **Table 1** *Deductive Codes Developed from the Literature Review*, informed the development of deductive codes and also helped to create the open-ended interview protocol:

Table 1

Deductive Codes Developed from the Literature Review

Onboarding Element	Code
Pre-boarding	Pre
Orientation	Orient
Culture	Cul
Introductions	Intro
Mentor	Ment
Technology	Tech
Feedback	Feed
Professional Development	ProfDev

I used the second interview to member-check the discoveries I made in interview one, using summaries developed from the first interview (See Appendix C), and to further explore the participants' unique, lived experience with the onboarding process in Eastwood.

In **Table 2** *Timeline for Data Collection*, I summarize the different activities in which I engaged over this seven-month period. Detailing the data collection process is helpful for future replication, so it was important for me to communicate the steps for that reason and also for transparency.

Table 2*Timeline for Data Collection*

Date	Description
November 2018 - December 2018	Scheduled and recorded first round of participant interviews: semi-structured, open-ended
November 2018 – January 2019	Transcribed and coded first round of participant interviews
November 2018 – January 2019	Gathered and reviewed material artifacts related to City Council onboarding
January 2019 – March 2019	Scheduled and recorded second round of participant interviews: open-ended (used data discovery from first interview to inform inquiry) - Member-checked data from interview #1 during second interviews
February 2019 – May 2019	Transcribed and coded second round of participant interviews

Once the interviews were transcribed, I was able to then code the interviews using a two-step coding process. From the initial round of coding, themes emerged, as did gaps in information. The second interviews were used to member-check information gleaned in the first interview, to fill in gaps in information, and continue to build upon the rich description.

Concurrently with participant interviews, I collected and analyzed material artifacts provided by participants and city staff who are directly involved in the council's orientation. From Eastwood's executive staff, I received the complete orientation handbook for new councilors. From a participant, I received for review the welcome packet that is mailed to newly elected officials by the state's municipal association. Each of the data collection approaches is discussed in further detail below.

Participant Interviews

I included a total of nine participants in the study; seven currently seated councilors on the Eastwood Council, one former council member, and the current City Manager. I emailed a recruitment letter and consent form to participants in advance of the first interview.

My initial expectation was that the participants could be asked to participate in up to three interviews. However, I only conducted two semi-structured interviews with current and past councilors (See Appendix A for interview protocol). Prior to beginning each interview, I reviewed and discussed the consent letter, answered any questions that the participants had, and asked the participant to sign the consent form. I returned a signed copy of the form to each participant for their records.

I scheduled the interviews through email and confirmed with participants via a Google calendar invite. I sent a reminder email approximately 24 to 48 hours in advance of each interview as a courtesy. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

The location of the interviews was dependent on preference and availability, with the ultimate locations being in a conference room or library study room on the campus of a local university, or in a private office off-campus. I posted a sign on the door of the interview room in order to ensure privacy and to avoid interruption.

At the beginning of the first interview with each participant, I displayed my Conceptual Framework and briefly described to the participant the difference between orientation and onboarding. To begin each interview, I asked the participants to describe how they came to run for the Eastwood Council. Time for storytelling allowed the participants to feel at ease and it also provided foundation and context for the semi-

structured interview questions. Following the interview protocol, I asked questions to gauge the degree to which the essential onboarding elements were absent or present in the participant's onboarding experience.

Following the first set of interviews with participants, I created a summary of each interview (See Appendix C) using descriptive coding, which I developed from my Conceptual Framework. The interview summaries also included follow-up questions, which I used to guide the second interview. The follow-up questions were informed by In Vivo coding, or inductive coding. Using the interview summaries (See Appendix C for an example), I member-checked the participant's answers pertaining to each onboarding element as displayed in my Conceptual Framework.

Recording and Transcribing Methods

I recorded interviews on two devices: an iPhone XR and a Sony ICD-UX560 digital recording device, to ensure that the recordings were preserved and to reduce the chance of a blank recording. I stored digital recordings on the University's secure server. The recordings of the transcriptions were transcribed and coded by-hand. Hand transcribing was beneficial in that it allowed for an enhanced connection with the data, but the drawback was that it was time intensive.

I used two methods of coding: descriptive (or deductive) coding and In-Vivo (or inductive) coding (Saldana, 2016). I used descriptive coding to determine the presence or absence of the essential elements of onboarding. In Vivo was used to identify themes and patterns that emerged outside of the bounds of the best-practices onboarding model and the deductive codes. Because there is no "fixed rule or formula for an average number of

codes per page or a recommended ratio of codes to text” (Saldana, 2016, p. 107), In Vivo offered more flexibility to supplement the descriptive coding.

Review of Physical Artifacts

Creswell and Poth (2018) submit that,

A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case. In order to accomplish this, the researcher collects and integrates many forms of qualitative data, ranging from interviews, to observations, to documents, to audio-visual materials. Relying on one source of data is typically not enough to develop an in-depth understanding. (p. 98)

In other words, it is necessary to include additional sources of data in order to achieve robust and valid findings and to best describe the case and its rich context.

To validate and enhance the findings, I collected physical artifacts from participants of the study and Eastwood’s executive staff. I reviewed the Eastwood City Council Orientation packet, as well as materials sent to the councilors by the State’s Municipal Association. The nature and setting of the case study, which is in the public realm, eliminated a major hurdle of artifact review usually stated as “accessibility due to privacy reasons” (Yin, 2018, p. 114).

While the data gathered via physical artifacts added another layer of validity and enhanced the case analysis, ultimately, the participant interviews provided the rich description from which I developed the findings.

Trustworthiness and Methodological Limitations

The following quote by Rossman and Rallis (2017) summarizes the goal of ethical and transparent research,

The ultimate aim for a study should be in its use, that is, the conduct of the study and its findings are sufficiently believable that others will use those findings to take action to improve social circumstances. (p. 50)

The goals of the research are to both describe the existing onboarding process in Eastwood, but also to offer recommendations that would improve the process for newly elected councilors. By improving the onboarding processes for city councilors, the councilors themselves benefit from increased knowledge and reduced time to proficiency. The councilors are, in turn, responsible for creating public policy, which has impacts for the local community. Therefore, my findings have the potential to improve social circumstances.

Rossman and Rallis (2017) emphasize the essential nature of integrity in research and argue that the process should be “deliberate, intentional, transparent, mindful, and ethically conducted” (p. 52). Throughout every stage of the case study of Eastwood Council’s onboarding process, I put transparency at the forefront of communications. Participants always had the choice to opt-out of participation. I provided them with complete information and they, in turn, participated willingly in the research. I considered their schedules and arranged interviews to accommodate their preferences, based on date, time, and location. The interview rooms themselves were private and I posted signage on the doors of the interview rooms to limit disruptions. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance. As such, I developed pseudonyms for all participants, as well as for the case study city itself.

The main limitation of the study was that it was time-bound, meaning, the data needed to be gathered and synthesized within the bounds of my academic program.

Initially, based on the nature of a councilor's schedules and commitments, I anticipated that a participant's availability and cooperation would be a possible limitation. However, that prediction was unfounded as the participants were generous with both their time and with their insights.

The second limitation is in the nature of the research design. With a case study, the findings are of specific relevance to the case itself. In this case, the findings are directly applicable to the Eastwood City Council. However, the conclusions offered in Chapter five might offer insight to other elected bodies.

Ethical Considerations

I delivered full and complete information about the purpose of the study to participants, and they could opt-out at any point in time. I obtained consent from each participant and I returned copies of the signed consent forms to each participant. Providing a consent form and obtaining participant's signatures ensured that I communicated clearly about the intent, process, and goals of the research and that the participants willingly agreed to take part.

I protected participants' identities by assigning pseudonyms. I de-identified the case study city by using generic language throughout the report (ie. mid-sized city in the northeast United States), as well assigning Eastwood as a pseudonym.

Being forthcoming about my role and my interest in public policy provides further transparency. In my role as researcher, which I expand upon below, I must "take every possible precaution to ensure that no harm will come to the participants as a result of their participation in the study" (Rossman & Rollis, 2016, p. 66). Finally, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the initial research proposal,

which adds another layer of assurance that the design and intent of the research was independently reviewed and approved.

Role of the Researcher

In my role with a local nonprofit, I regularly attend city council meetings, council committee meetings, and meet one-on-one with the councilors to discuss important policy issues and local ordinances. My regular contact and communication with many of the councilors has built and strengthened our professional relationships and added to our mutual respect.

The professional rapport I have established means that I can circumvent the need for a gatekeeper. Entering into this research with a base level of trust allowed for direct access to the participants. On the one hand, my existing collegial relationships are beneficial for access. On the other hand, a potential drawback is that the existing professional relationships might have caused the participants to be more or less forthcoming with me than they would with a researcher whom they did not know prior. While that would be difficult or impossible to measure, it is important to note.

Member Checking

Member checking is a critical step in ensuring validity. As Cresswell and Poth (2018) postulate, “This approach, writ large, in most qualitative studies involves taking data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (p. 261).

During the two interviews, participants provided accounts of their onboarding experiences. Since individuals have unique experiences, the accounts varied from participant to participant. However, commonalities did emerge between participants, so

it was beneficial to use member-checking in the second interview to verify participants' accounts of their onboarding experience. This process allowed me to identify areas where there was general agreement and other areas where participants had very different experiences with the same element of onboarding, for example, in their experience with introductions to key people.

After the first set of interviews, I synthesized the themes and drafted interview summaries. (See Appendix C) I reviewed the interview summaries and used them to member-check the information with each participant during the second interview. What is included in the analysis is just as important as what is missing (Cresswell & Poth, 2018), so it was important to have a second interview to member-check the accounts of their onboarding experience and also to clarify and expand upon themes that emerged in the first interview that did not fall into my Conceptual Framework.

A qualitative case study allows for a rich description, while two-tiered coding allows for deep analysis. Using my Conceptual Framework, the participants shared their perceptions and experiences as it pertained to the onboarding process for new councilors in Eastwood. In Chapter four, my findings explore the presence or absence of elements of best practice and discover other unique elements that apply directly to the case.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this research is to understand the perspectives and experiences of newly elected members of the Eastwood City Council as it pertains to their onboarding. Onboarding, for the purposes of this study, is defined as the way in which councilors learn their new role through an intentional process or designed program which supports their integration into the Eastwood Council. The findings of this study have added to the understanding of one councilors' lived experience with onboarding and it has also added to the literature regarding LEO training.

The study examines the participants' perspectives on onboarding's best-practices elements, which informed the Conceptual Framework. In this chapter, I discuss the presence or absence of each element and to what degree each element was present during the councilors' onboarding program. Further analysis of the data, through deductive and inductive coding, revealed themes and practices not captured in the literature review, but which are very real and important elements of the Eastwood councilors' direct experience of learning their new roles as elected officials. The councilors' experience is highlighted in this chapter, along with the emerging themes. Drawing on the councilors' experiences with onboarding, the Conceptual Framework developed through the literature review is updated to reflect the actual lived experience of the councilors in Eastwood. It is important to note that the updated framework highlights the differences between onboarding best-practices elements as detailed in the literature review and the unique onboarding experience of the city councilors in Eastwood.

Following are the findings which will answer the two research questions:

(1) To what degree is an onboarding program offered to newly elected city councilors in Eastwood?

(2) What are the public policy implications in the absence of an onboarding program?

Research Question One: To What Degree is an Onboarding Program Offered to Newly Elected City Councilors in Eastwood?

Is the city of Eastwood providing an onboarding program? If so, to what degree? Is the program reflective of best-practices as outlined in the literature review in Chapter Two? Using these questions, I sought to understand participants' perspectives and experiences with onboarding. The findings show that newly elected councilors in Eastwood are being provided with some, but not all elements of a best practices onboarding program.

The councilors' first experience during the pre-boarding phase is a congratulatory call from the City Manager and from fellow council colleagues. The executive staff extends an invitation to the orientation session to the councilors, as well as an invitation to the post-inauguration event at city hall. The timing of the orientation session, whether occurring during the pre-boarding phase or after swearing-in, varied by participant. What also varied was the depth and breadth of the orientation. All but one of the councilors did not recall being offered a mentor or 'buddy' on the council to whom they could go with questions.

Understanding the culture is one of the more difficult best-practices elements to implement in the context of the public sector. Within the Eastwood City Council, the process of understanding the culture happens organically, rather than in a more

prescribed fashion. Much of this understanding is developed by simply engaging in the process through observing and through the relationships that councilors build on both sides of the dais.

An area that lacked consistency for the Eastwood Council was introductions to key people, which is an important element of onboarding. While some had a very positive and impactful experience during their orientation, others did not. On the other hand, professional development opportunities were cited as one of the most beneficial aspects of council onboarding. All of the councilors noted having participated in professional development opportunities. However, how those opportunities are communicated by executive staff and prioritized in the budget is still unclear to some on the council.

An area where the Eastwood Council has shown improvement in the last few years is in the area of technology. Much of the credit was given to City Manager Isaac, the current city manager and former White House staffer, who has been boldly leading the charge on upgrades to software and other digital infrastructure that supports the council's ability to conduct business. The final component of best-practices onboarding, feedback, was perhaps one of the more complex areas to try and define. Since the roles and relationships between the council and Manager and the council and their constituents do not follow the traditional employee-employer model that is reflected in private sector research, the feedback loops within the Eastwood Council are both unique and non-linear.

While the City of Eastwood's executive staff is responsible for implementing some elements of the councilors' onboarding, there is also great opportunity to formalize the process to ensure that it is comprehensive and that it incorporates best-practices.

When asked to reflect on the onboarding program currently being offered to newly elected councilors on the Eastwood Council, City Manager Isaac said,

I don't think that the city did a very good job and we still don't do a perfect job of onboarding. I think that there are a lot of other things, tools that we could provide for onboarding. (February 19, 2019, p. 4)

There are a variety of reasons for why this could be the case, but in Isaac's words:

We're being asked to do so much more and we're stretched so thin in trying to get everything done. Hence the reason why I don't think people paid much attention to the onboarding of the council because you're just trying to get through your day. (February 19, 2019, p. 4)

Demands on both city staff and councilors make it difficult to design and implement a program that reduces the time to proficiency for the newly elected councilors and supports them throughout their first year as policymakers. The councilors cited wide variation in how robust they felt the process was and many confused the one-day orientation they received with onboarding, which should be a year-long program. In several of the interviews I had to remind the participants that onboarding is a process, whereas orientation is an event that typically lasts only one or two days.

The councilors also agreed that, while it is important for the individual to take personal ownership in preparing for the role, the expectation is that there should be a process by which new councilors are provided with information and tools to help them do their jobs well. Councilor Aggrey, a first-term councilor who works for a local university, said, "Yes, I understand that when you decide to run in city government, you should try to understand the city that you are trying to work in, but there needs to be

some sort of formal orientation” (February 12, 2019, p. 5). In this brief statement, Councilor Aggrey displays this interchangeable language that the councilors used, calling the process of preparing the councilors to serve ‘orientation’. At the same time, Councilor Aggrey also highlights the need to provide councilors with support as they begin to make important policy decisions for the community. While newly elected officials bear some responsibility, it should not be the sole responsibility of the individual to gain all the knowledge and tools that they will need to be effective in their new role.

Participants’ Perspectives on the Conceptual Framework

The following sections directly align with my Conceptual Framework. The first interview with each participant was structured to better understand their personal perspectives in relation to my Conceptual Framework (See Figure 1). In the pages to follow, I present each element in the order in which they are most typically experienced in an onboarding process.

Pre-boarding. Receiving a call from the City Manager on election night with a note of congratulations is the most common experience during pre-boarding. For the purposes of this case study, pre-boarding is defined as the time between Election Day and the swearing in ceremony for the new councilors. The swearing-in ceremony, or inauguration, happens approximately four to six weeks after Election Day. During the pre-boarding phase, councilors typically receive a congratulatory call from the City Manager on Election night. In the days following their election, the executive staff calls the new councilors to organize an orientation session. At the same time, executive staff works with the new councilors to coordinate invite lists for the social event at City Hall, which follows the official swearing-in ceremony. In addition to the City Manager, many

of the currently seated councilors also make congratulatory calls to the new councilors and invite them to coffee.

Councilor Lagaris, a lawyer who joined the council in 2014, felt that this window of time between Election Day and inauguration could pose challenges to beginning the onboarding process:

I mean, most people, the day after an election, if you're on the ballot...are just totally fried. They're not going to be able to mentally give the time and energy to do it [council orientation] for at least another week or two, or it's just going to be in one ear and out the other. (February 14, 2019, p. 3)

Councilor Reddy, a retired lobbyist who has served on the council since 2001, saw this time between Election Day and inauguration as opportune. When asked, "How critical is that window of opportunity between Election Day and swearing in for providing information and onboarding?" Councilor Reddy responded:

Very critical because the day you are sworn in, you don't vote on anything too hefty, but you are already in a meeting, voting. So, it is very key to make sure people understand what they are going to be doing and the responsibilities that they now hold...and the committees that they are going to be on, so that they can begin to try and organize themselves for the year ahead. (January 24, 2019, p. 9)

With the task of voting on city business on the agenda at some of their very first council meetings, the window of opportunity between Election Day and inauguration is a critical time to begin onboarding. While all the councilors recall having a structured orientation, it was not clear whether the orientation was scheduled during the pre-boarding window or after their first council meeting.

Orientation. Often confused with onboarding, orientation is an event whereby onboarding is a process. Eastwood City Councilors are all invited to an orientation where they are provided with important information pertaining to City of Eastwood business, including the organizational structure and council responsibilities. The information is delivered in a three-ring binder that they receive as part of orientation. Councilor Lagaris summarized the orientation during our first interview and described it this way: “..High level overviews of a variety of city departments and we’re given large amounts of information to try and (laughs) digest about city operations, programs, I mean ...enormous binders that we did our best to work through” (November 18, 2018, p. 4).

Included in the council orientation packet are the following documents: a welcome letter, general information, seating guidelines, the City Charter, information about the Freedom of Access Act (FOAA), City Council Rules, an overview of Parliamentary procedures, information about Inauguration Day, and Council Goals (City of Eastwood Orientation packet, 2018). An overview of each department is also included in the materials distributed during the orientation session. The orientation itself is brief, with some participants recalling it lasting only a few hours and others who recall that it was a full day. Councilor Ancher, a former councilor who also served in the State House of Representatives, shared a very pointed perspective on his onboarding experience:

Councilor Ancher: ...that’s how it was when I was on the council. It was like, we’ll bring you in for a day and then we’re done.

Interviewer: One day?

Councilor Ancher: One day.

Interviewer: Met with all the department heads?

Councilor Ancher: Right. Go home with a box full of binders, a headache, and just going “What the hell have I got myself into?” and just feeling totally overwhelmed. (November 29, 2018, p. 9)

Not all the participants were as overwhelmed as Ancher, however. Councilor Galani, who works for a local transportation organization and is currently serving his eighth term on the council, recalled that it was a “fairly thorough entry process” (December 21, 2018, p. 3). Councilor Fortier, a second-term councilor, lawyer, and Eastwood native, used the same description of the process, but neither councilor specifically cited a feeling of being overwhelmed.

Councilor Caldwell, a first-term councilor and lobbyist, indicated that her orientation was sufficient, but for slightly different reasons than the other councilors -- her expectations of the process:

Interviewer: Generally speaking, do you think that the process you went through was sufficient for you to understand your role as a councilor and to be effective?

Councilor Caldwell: Yup.

Interviewer: Good.

Councilor Caldwell: I didn't expect much. (December 4, 2018, p. 16)

In the second interview, as part of the member-checking process, I followed up with Councilor Caldwell about this particular point, on which she further elaborated:

Interviewer: But, from your perspective, from what it sounds like in the first interview, at the very least that the orientation was sufficient and maybe the pre-boarding was sufficient?

Councilor Caldwell: Yeah, but I wouldn't call that a process because it's self-directed. So, somebody else may have had a different experience, in other words. It wasn't the city's onboarding process. It was my onboarding process. (January 30, 2019, p. 8)

Councilor Caldwell's comments are not lacking in merit. The differences in the councilors' experiences were highlighted in their recollection of the process. Each participant recalled their orientation in a slightly different way. The length of time of the orientation varied, as well as which city staff were included in the process. Some councilors were introduced to department heads and one participant did not meet any. At least two participants recalled getting tours of municipal facilities and city-owned properties. A couple of the councilors indicated that other currently seated councilors played a part in their orientation, in one instance, even leading one of the orientation sessions.

The data are consistent in determining that Eastwood is implementing an orientation as part of the councilors' onboarding process. However, the consistency with which the orientation is delivered varies greatly. The variation is reflected in the length of the experience, the depth and breadth of information covered, which staff are involved, and their overall impression of the orientation. The result is that each councilor receives a different introduction to their role.

Mentoring. While a formal mentoring system is not a part of Eastwood's onboarding process, several of the councilors cited that it would be a welcome addition, though it would need to be carefully developed. Councilor Ancher reflected "I think the

concept of mentorship in this environment is difficult to do and do well” (November 29, 2018, p. 11).

In the private sector, the presence of a mentor as part of the onboarding process has been shown to improve the effectiveness of the new hire and increases their chance of success (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011). The individual who is assigned as a mentor is usually another staff member and typically in a more senior role (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011; Gold & Devins, 2003). The mentor provides advice and support, while embedding the organizational culture (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011). Mentorship is not exclusive to onboarding in the private sector; it is used in both healthcare and libraries as part of an overall development program (Fajana & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011; Franklin, 2019; Koppel, et al., 2017).

In the public sector, the political nature of the role of a councilor poses a unique challenge when trying to provide mentorship without influencing a newly elected, for example, with regard to their policy perspective. However, mentoring was recognized by the Eastwood council as having the potential to benefit newly elected councilors, if designed thoughtfully. Most participants agreed that the ideal mentorship opportunity could be presented to new councilors as a recommendation, rather than a mandate. The mentor should be an individual chosen by the new councilor, rather than assigned.

Only one of the participants, Councilor Fortier, recalled having a mentor assigned to him. Councilor Fortier noted that his mentor was a currently seated councilor at the time. He indicated that his mentor was helpful in making introductions to constituents and that “he was a good mentor” (December 17, 2018, p. 7). None of the other

participants recall being assigned a formal mentor, but rather that they sought out mentors on their own.

On the Eastwood Council, many of these mentor relationships develop during the time when the councilors are considering running for council. They seek the advice of trusted colleagues and, in some cases, those colleagues are former councilors. Once seated on the council as a newly elected, mentors come in all forms, from currently seated councilors and past councilors, to other respected members of the community. Councilors seek each other out for help and advice on issues that they think another councilor has had more experience with or who might share a different perspective that will help them see an issue in a different light. Councilor Galani reflected on his experience:

You know, my experience with councilors over the years is, they're not...very few have ever been bashful about reaching out, with questions or comments. And I try...I think I probably said this and I don't know, but I think probably everyone does...is when a new councilor comes on board, whether I've known them or not, I try to go out and have a coffee with them at least once or twice and chat or just listen, answer questions. (March 4, 2019, p. 8)

Coffee and coffee culture both play an important role in how councilors build relationships. Later in this chapter, I will delve into coffee-culture and relationship-building and how that relates to the Eastwood councilors' onboarding experience.

Seating Arrangements. Another way that mentorship naturally evolves on the Eastwood Council is through seating arrangements. Being seated next to a more senior councilor can be a welcomed opportunity for a newly elected. Many hours are spent

behind the dais debating important council business at city council meetings. It is during these critical hours that councilors lean over to their colleagues to ask for advice or to just ask clarifying questions about council process. In other words, who you are sitting next to behind the dais can shape your experience on the council and determines how much support you get, especially as a newly elected.

Councilor Strong, a second-term councilor and freelance writer, best summarized how seating arrangements can be helpful to a newly elected:

...So helpful to have someone else in the same place as you, so that you can lean over during a meeting and say “What did we just do? What are we doing?” (laughs) and then also lean over to the other side to someone who is more experienced and say “Does this mean...?”. (January 31, 2019, p. 7)

When talking about two Green party councilors who were newly elected several years back, Councilor Reddy had this to say:

Jackie Fernald, the Republican, became a pretty good ‘go-to’ person for them, Jackie *and* Nancy. That’s because they were seated on the same side of the dais as them [the Green party councilors]. So, you could lean over while something’s going on and there’s some procedural question, you could lean over and go ..”Um?”..and get a response. I think it was formally there, but not formally managed. (November 9, 2018, p. 9)

For those who do not receive the benefit of sitting next to a senior councilor, or whose seating arrangements were not assigned thoughtfully (bearing in mind that the new councilors might need additional support), one’s seating position can be isolating.

Councilor Aggrey recollected the following about the difference in where he was placed behind the dais and where another new councilor was seated:

...But, he [Lee Rhodes] sits next to...Lucas and he clicked right away. Perhaps because of age or whatever it is, it was easy for them to click. I was not like that.

I was left on my own. I was sat on a corner by myself. (November 7, 2018, p. 9)

Aggrey did offer a potential solution. If the Mayor chooses not to assign seats, which is part of the Mayor's role in the Council Rules, "maybe councilors need to understand that anytime there's a new person coming up, councilors should offer...councilors themselves shall offer to the person..." (November 7, 2018, p. 9)., meaning that the councilors should take the lead in suggesting a seating arrangement that would be helpful to the newly elected councilors.

Understanding the Culture. The culture of an organization can sometimes be hard to define and it can be even more difficult to explain how the organizational culture is learned. In Eastwood, councilors come to understand the culture of the council via seniority, collegiality, by experiencing and being in the process, through relationships, and by witnessing the values at play. As a new councilor, this can be difficult, as Councilor Galani suggests, "Yeah, I mean, I think from a new councilor perspective, one who's never been involved in elected or appointed government, it could be challenging, I think, to figure out that culture" (December 21, 2018, p. 10).

Newly elected councilors who have served previously as elected officials in other bodies also face challenges in trying to unlearn the culture of the elected body of which they are used to. Councilor Fortier witnessed this firsthand: "I think there has been a demonstration of a lack of specific cultural norms based on where that person served

prior...but this is not the legislature and...municipal government is so different”

(December 17, 2018, p. 17).

The role of two important documents, the city’s Charter and the Council Rules, was generally seen as having some influence on the council culture, yet there was not agreement among the participants that these two documents alone shape the culture of the council. The culture is shaped more so by informal processes, which can leave the culture open to interpretation. Councilor Caldwell summarized the conflict between what is written and what is understood:

The Charter...that definitely has a role in the culture. But, it’s everybody’s *view* of the Charter and the proper role of the council compared to the Manager and compared to the Mayor of how they view things that should work. And to me, there’s an inherent fuzziness in all of it. And I think, for some others, I think there is less of that because they are ingrained in the culture that is the council, sometimes for fifteen or twenty years and it’s more about ‘how we’ve always done things’ then it is about what the Charter says, or what it is about whatever.
(December 4, 2018 p. 5)

So, while there is certainly a role for the Charter and the Council Rules in defining the culture, there is also room to make this transfer, from words to action, more intentional and to ensure that the intended outcome is being achieved. That is, if the Council rules and the Charter exist to help build the council culture, it should be clear that it is the intention or to amend the documents to reflect what is actually visible as the culture. Councilor Caldwell alluded to this gap between what the process is said to be or should be and what materializes as the Councilor’s experience: “...And as part of that

culture, understanding the culture of the organization, it's really understanding the operational rules, the process, if you will. And not just the formal process, as it's written down, but the process as it actually is applied" (January 30, 2019, p. 15).

In the case of Eastwood, though it is not written anywhere, the participants emphasized how important relationship-building is to the culture of the Council. This norm is learned from day one, when fellow councilors reach out to congratulate the new candidates and invite them to coffee. Caldwell recalled, "I do think there's a culture on council to reach out to a new member...that councilors reach out to a new member or you reach out to the councilors as a new member to schedule a coffee, get to know you" (January 30, 2019, p. 8).

Councilor Galani emphasized the importance of relationship-building in our first interview:

Relationships are so important being an elected official. I can think of plenty of times we've all disagreed, I mean we don't all agree on the same thing, but you can discuss it and be really good friends and disagree and not be mad at each other. And I think that's the type of relationship and culture you want to have...where you kind of, not to be cliché, but you're kind of hard on the issues but soft on the people. So, I think it's the relationship building where you learn the culture of how the elected body works. And that takes time. (December 21, 2018, p. 11)

So, while understanding the culture of the Eastwood City Council might not be a planned module in the new councilors' onboarding program, it is clear that that the councilors are gaining an understanding of the culture through building relationships.

New councilors also discover the culture by “poking and prodding the process” as Councilor Fortier (December 17, 2018, p. 8) does and also by looking at important documents with a critical eye.

Networking and Introductions. Being introduced to key people was one of the participants’ most inconsistent experiences. In some instances, the newly elected councilors met many of the department heads and got a broad overview of the responsibilities of each department. Others indicated that they were not introduced to key people who worked for the city. Furthermore, at least two lamented that, since the message from executive leadership was that they shouldn’t be interacting with key staff anyway, why should introductions to key people be made? The following exchange with Councilor Aggrey emphasizes this tension:

Interviewer: It would be the City Manager or somebody else’s responsibility in your onboarding process to make introductions to people within city hall or outside of city hall or within council that could help you and support you. So, that wasn’t something that was done?

Aggrey: Oh, Okay. No.

Interviewer: No?

Aggrey: There’s nothing like that. Of course, I think during the meetings, they’ll introduce you to...“Oh, this person does this, this person does that”. That’s it. But, you cannot contact them, so why are you showing them to me if I cannot contact them? (November 7, 2018, p. 14)

Those who did have the opportunity for more intentional and thorough introductions clearly benefited, as Councilor Reddy told me: “I thought [one-on-one

meetings with key people] was essential to my being able to feel like I could be effective” (November 9, 2018, p. 7).

In addition to meeting with key people, regular meetings with the City Manager are seen as beneficial, said Councilor Strong: “Most people schedule meetings with the City Manager, monthly or semi-monthly right from the get-go, so that’s a good opportunity” (January 31, 2019, p. 4). This opportunity is offered to all councilors, but not all take advantage of it and, if they do, some do so more regularly than others.

Most of the networking and introductions to key people that were made were self-directed, meaning the councilors would seek out constituents and other stakeholders with whom they wanted to give and receive information. If a specific policy topic was in front of the council, often those who were most directly involved with or who would be impacted by the policy would reach out to the councilors. For example, if the local historical society was advocating for a particular policy issue or ordinance, they would reach out to councilors to be sure their key staff met with councilors or at least communicated their position via email. Outreach and introductions, in many cases, are coming from the organizations to the councilors, rather than the other way around.

Networking and introductions to key people, which is an important best practice, is not provided in a way that is viewed as consistently implemented or having a net positive benefit for all newly elected councilors in Eastwood. Those participants who did have what they viewed as positive experiences with introductions found it to be a valuable asset, which helped them in their roles.

Professional Development. By far, professional development was viewed as the most valuable element of the onboarding process by the case study participants. Even

though the process by which professional development can be accessed and the total amount of funds available to be used for professional development are unclear, the opportunities, when taken advantage of, pay great dividends.

Councilor Aggrey spoke to the lack of clarity in how professional development funds are identified and accessed:

Today I was asking Councilor...one of the councilors, like “I know that we have ‘x’ amount of money for our professional development and travels and things, but do we have individual councilor budget line for?”...and then the person said “I have no idea” and I don’t know either. So, kinda like detailed things like that...its’ not...unless you ask, nobody will willingly give it to you. (November 7, 2018, p. 7)

Councilor Reddy is just as unclear:

Interviewer: My understanding is that there is some kind of professional development money in the council budget, but my question is...was that told to you? Were you aware of it? During your orientation did they say “There’s a professional development budget and you can spend it on conferences”? Were you aware of how much that was?

Reddy: No, no – and I still don’t know. (November 9, 2018, p. 14)

City Manager Isaac agrees that the process could be improved:

Interviewer: How is that communicated to the councilors, either throughout the orientation or onboarding process, about what’s available and how they can use it and if there’s a certain amount per councilor...

Isaac: I honestly don't think we do a very good job of that. (February 19, 2019, p. 7)

Of all the organizations providing professional development to elected officials, the National League of Cities was viewed most favorably by the participants. Councilor Reddy noted "the National League of Cities I think is an excellent resource for professional development. We should be encouraging every councilor to be involved in the National League of Cities" (November 9, 2018, p. 14). Councilor Galani agrees "I try to go to the National League of Cities conference every year" (December 21, 2018, p. 4), as does Councilor Aggrey,

So [the National League of Cities] sent me something saying "Welcome aboard.

We are the National League of Cities and we would love to have you on board".

So, I said "Yes", I would go to the conference and it was really important. It was a good learning opportunity for me. (November 7, 2018, p. 2)

Attending the national conference in Washington, DC is seen as a critically important way for councilors to build rapport and to learn from their peers in other cities. Councilor Strong brought this point home when she described her experience in DC:

...It was also good because it's a great opportunity to talk with people in other municipalities and find out what they're facing and how they're dealing with it. And it was really...it's like when you go to a protest march with all these like-minded people and you just feel like "Ah! I'm not alone!". There's a really similar feeling, like "Oh my god, we're all struggling with this!". We're all struggling with opioid addiction, we're all struggling with taxes going up and less money coming to municipalities and more services being requested and how do

we handle it and crumbling infrastructure and...so, it is very helpful and inspiring, to go and do those opportunities. (November 29, 2018, p. 10)

The state Municipal Association was also seen as a valuable resource, but not as much as the National League of Cities (NLC). Whereas the NLC has a broader view and speaks to issues facing municipalities with larger populations, the state Municipal Association is viewed as more relevant to smaller municipalities and towns. Former Councilor Ancher put it succinctly, “I think [the state municipal association], for a city like Eastwood, is less of a resource” (November 29, 2018, p. 14).

During our first interview, Councilor Strong confirmed the value of professional development:

Interviewer: So, hugely important not only for you for professional development, but then for the knowledge that you bring back to the city...

Strong: Yes.

Interviewer: Because it enables you to be a more effective leader...

Strong: Yes.

Interviewer: And decision-maker for the taxpayers, for your constituents, for the city...

Strong: Yeah, absolutely. (November 29, 2018, p. 10)

While professional development is supported wholly by the councilors, there are still many hurdles to prioritizing the opportunities in what is an already full schedule. With the majority of councilors engaged in full-time employment in addition to their duties as a city councilor, available time is a major hurdle. Another, less obvious hurdle

is trying to avoid being viewed as going on a ‘junket’, as former Councilor Ancher so aptly describes:

It’s a real tough issue because, on the one hand there’s a great sensitivity as being tagged as....‘Ancher is going to New Orleans using tax dollars’. Well, New Orleans might happen to be where the National League of Cities conference is, so I would just say that, on the one hand there is a reluctance sometimes to use money to travel to what would, in the private sector or nonprofit sector, would be generally widely acceptable as ‘that’s what you do’. (November 29, 2018, p. 15)

With all the potential challenges that councilors face in trying to build their individual and collective wisdom through continuing education, the benefits, according to the participants, far outweigh the costs. Councilor Fortier summarizes this beautifully, “I think professional development is hugely important” (December 17, 2018, p. 11). During our interview, City Manager Isaac echoed Councilor Fortier’s views: “I think it’s invaluable” (February 19, 2019, p. 7).

Technology. Eastwood has made visible improvements and investments in the technology that is used to support the council. City Manager Isaac is credited with being the impetus for the change and the improvements have been welcomed and embraced by the councilors. While the upgrades have been helpful, there is also a sense that there is even more that can be done to support the council in how they access information, communicate with each other and their constituents, and just generally keep up with advances in the public sector as they are available.

Eastwood City Councilors who have served more than one term on council can recall the days when paper, not technology, ruled. Councilor Reddy detailed the

multitude of documents that she received during the orientation and onboarding process, “And, at the time, it wasn’t all electronic, it was just a ginormous book!” (November 9, 2018, p. 6). Councilor Fortier was also a recipient of ‘the binder’,

Interviewer: And then, thinking back to your orientation and onboarding and about how materials were provided to you...did you receive them electronically?

Fortier: (Laughs)

Interviewer: In paper format? Is there a portal that you can go on and get all of the information?

Fortier: At the time, we did not have Gmail, if you can believe that. We had some archaic computer program you could only use from a desktop with specific Windows, right?

Interviewer: Okay.

Fortier: I mean that was...where we were.

Interviewer: Had some technology challenges?

Fortier: Oh yeah. There was no investment. It was all provided to us in paper form and we showed up and they had a booklet for us and it was helpful.

Interviewer: So, you got a binder?

Fortier: Yep. (December 17, 2018, p. 14)

While Councilor Fortier has no problem decrying the lack of technology, he is also the first to point out the critical upgrades that have been made under City Manager Isaacs’ leadership, “Technology was a super-huge problem when we first got here and it, I mean, just the change since...it’s been only three complete years, so...a total transformation. I mean, it’s incredible” (December 17, 2018, 15).

Manager Isaac has invested in improvements for the council, but also recognizes that his work is not done, “I do think though that, in the future, that there is much greater opportunity to utilize technology” (February 19, 2019, p. 5).

Feedback. In a typical private sector environment, the employer provides feedback to the employee and, in an ideal setting; the employer also receives feedback from the employee. This process can help the employee improve performance and it can also help the employer identify areas of opportunity in improving the workplace. In the public sector, specifically in municipal government, locally elected officials are not hired by the City Manager. In fact, the opposite is true; the council selects and hires the City Manager. The council itself is ‘hired’ by registered voters of the municipality through the municipal election process. In the case of the Eastwood City Council, this makes the feedback loop slightly more complicated.

While the councilors and the City Manager in Eastwood may not always agree on matters of public policy, they do exhibit a good rapport. From the dialog with participants, feedback, for the most part, flows freely. As a part of the councilors’ ongoing onboarding, Manager Isaac makes himself available for regular meetings with the councilors, should they so choose. The regular meetings are used to discuss important topics that are coming in front of council and are offered as a way to give and receive information directly with the City Manager. Councilors may also meet with the Mayor as well, as Councilor Aggrey said when we met for our first interview, “Each of us have the ability to meet with the Manager and Mayor separately and how we use it or what you talk...what conversation you have with them, is a little different for each of us” (November 7, 2018, p. 12).

Aside from feedback and conversations between the councilors and their staff, which includes the City Manager, Corporation Counsel, and the City Clerk, the participants in this study responded that they mostly receive feedback from their constituents, colleagues, and friends and family. Councilor Strong discussed with me during our first interview how she receives feedback:

Interviewer: And how do you get feedback about your role and your performance as a councilor? Is that mainly from your constituents?

Strong: Yeah, I would say constituents and that's freely given. (Laughs) So, yeah...mainly from constituents. Certainly, I think all of us on the council talk to one another about "Hey, I like the way you handled that" or "I'm having trouble with this issue", or "I don't agree with you on this". So, I feel really comfortable talking with my colleagues and, I would say, you know, all of my councilor colleagues are really receptive to that. (November 29, 2018, p. 11)

Councilor Fortier and I also had a fairly comprehensive conversation about all of the avenues for feedback during our first meeting:

Interviewer: So...feedback. You say you get a lot of feedback from constituents?

Fortier: Oh yeah, all the time.

Interviewer: And that's how you're guided sometimes, to know whether you're doing a good job or not?

Fortier: For sure.

Interviewer: Is there any method for you to provide feedback to the Manager or to the city about how things are going? A process that could be improved? What do you know about that?

Fortier: Daily. (Laughs) I do that daily. I mean, that's what we do daily.

(December 17, 2018, p. 16)

Councilor Fortier elaborated on the many ways in which feedback is given and received: through email with constituents, email communications and personal meetings with the City Manager, in exchanges with fellow councilors, and through the annual review process whereby the Council evaluates their staff.

Councilor Fortier's description of the many pathways of feedback is a good representation of how most of the case study participants understood the process of feedback, though some of the participants did indicate that it could be helpful to outline a more formal process to provide for better transparency and consistency. Councilor Caldwell spoke to this: "I think it would be beneficial for the council and for the leaders of our staff to be able to provide feedback of what they need, what they're seeing, what the issues are. Hopefully we can do it" (December 4, 2018, p. 8).

While there was not a clear path forward for what that process would ultimately look like, the Rules and Reports Committee was seen as a potential avenue for providing more formal feedback to staff and, potentially, about how to begin a discussion about improving the onboarding process for newly elected councilors.

Summary of Participants' Perspectives of the Conceptual Framework

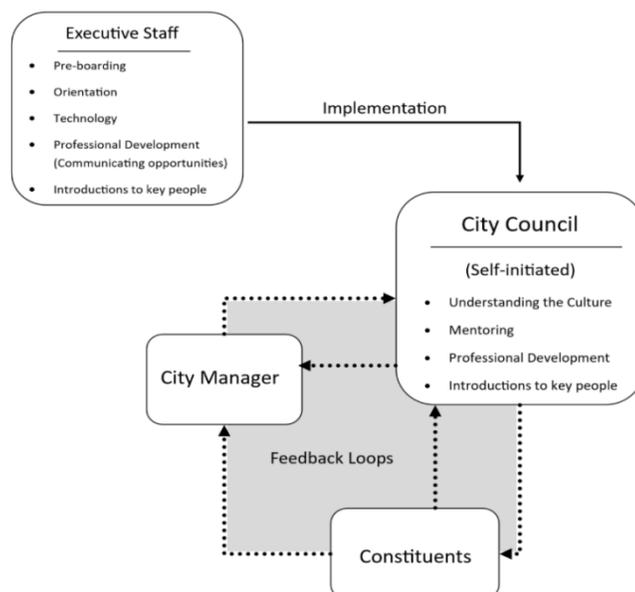
The interviews with participants revealed the efforts of the City of Eastwood's executive staff and their intention to help new councilors adapt to their new roles. While the councilors' experiences with the onboarding framework varied, the majority of the councilors are being provided with several important components, including orientation, professional development, and opportunities for feedback. In contrast to my Conceptual

Framework where it is the employer who provides the onboarding experience to the newcomer, in Eastwood, the councilors themselves are actively involved in their own onboarding.

While the executive staff reaches out during pre-boarding, curates the orientation where introductions are made to key people, provides technology and professional development opportunities, the councilors also take the initiative to adapt to the organization. The councilors build relationships and seek out mentors to better understand the culture, actively seek out professional development opportunities, and identify key people to reach out to that will enhance their knowledge of important policy issues. The feedback loop is constant and flows between the councilors, the city manager, and constituents. **Figure 2** *Participants' Perspectives on the Conceptual Framework* illustrates a modification to the Framework. This is based on the participants' perspectives on best-practices elements for onboarding.

Figure 2

Participants' Perspectives on the Conceptual Framework



Note. This figure illustrates a modification to the Conceptual Framework based on the participants' perspectives on best-practices elements for onboarding.

The results of the participant interviews informed this new model of my Conceptual Framework, which shows that executive staff implements some elements of onboarding, while others are self-initiated by the councilors. Feedback loops are constant between the councilors, the City Manager, and constituents. The councilors and the City Manager recognize that there are opportunities to improve the process.

Other themes emerged throughout the participant interviews that did not fit the traditional private sector onboarding model. In the following pages, I explore the complicated world of how newly elected councilors navigate Eastwood Council's culture and find their way to being effective, thoughtful, and connected policymakers.

Participants' Experiences with Onboarding in Eastwood

The beginning of this chapter focused on participants' perspectives on my Conceptual Framework that reflects best practices in the private sector and, in some cases, the nonprofit sector. The focus of this section is to reveal the councilors' experiences with the onboarding program as it is being delivered in Eastwood.

What the findings demonstrate is that newly elected officials come into their role with a wide range of prior experience. Some of those experiences are directly relevant to what they will encounter as councilors and, for others; their experiences have not fully prepared them for what lies ahead. The Eastwood Council has a culture that is based around relationship building and coffee, which allows them to develop the foundation for civil discourse and compromise -- essential skills for those in elected office. Another theme that emerged from the data was the sheer abundance of information that the

councilors receive from a variety of sources, which can be overwhelming. The final theme that emerged was navigating the waters of understanding one's role and power within the boundaries of the organization and the council structure.

Preparation for the Role. Elected officials do not always come into their role having direct experience with policymaking. At the local level, this is frequently the case. While there are many organizations that prepare candidates to run for office, there is not as much support for councilors and the skills that they will need, once elected. As a city councilor, one must make decisions on complex issues ranging from zoning and licensing, union contracts and water management practices, to referendum and municipal budgeting. A well-developed onboarding process should provide an overview of these and many other facets of local government, but the time to prepare is short. Between Election Day and a councilor's first meeting, there is less than six weeks to begin the onboarding process and ensure that councilors are prepared for what lies ahead.

So, how do new councilors feel about this learning curve? Councilor Strong recognizes the unique challenges that come with this revered position:

Yeah, I think there is some trial and error. I also think onboarding in this position in particular is really challenging because there's so much information coming at once and so many people wanting to introduce themselves to you, get your ear, start culminating... start creating relationships. So, it is a bit like drinking from a firehose. And that's true of lots of new jobs, but I'm not sure every new job provides you with 12,000 new people and business people and other elected officials and directors on boards that suddenly need to have coffee with you (Laughs). (November 29, 2018, p. 12)

Councilor Ancher is more blunt in his assessment: “I’ve seen Councilors who get elected and really are lost, frankly. Because they had no clue what they were getting into. And when serving alongside them, you could see that they were not prepared at all” (November 29, 2018, p. 3).

Councilor Fortier was honest about not grasping the full picture of what would be expected of him as a policymaker, “I didn’t really know anything about local government aside from being involved in different campaigns” (December 17, 2018, p. 3). I inquired further about what it might take to prepare candidates for their new role:

Interviewer: So, is there anything that can prepare you for the wide variety and diversity of topics that you’re going to encounter as a councilor?

Fortier: No, I don’t think so. I mean, everyone comes at it with a different worldview, right? (December 17, 2018, p. 4)

Councilor Ancher echoes this sentiment,

But, seriously...how does someone know what actually being a councilor involves, unless you’ve done it or unless someone you know very well has done it and you’ve had a chance to really see the good, the bad, and the ugly of local public service? (November 29, 2018, p. 2)

Not everyone on the Eastwood Council came to their position completely unprepared. Many had served on the local school board or in the state legislature prior to being elected onto the council. Having served in an elected capacity prior to being elected onto the Eastwood Council, these individuals felt more prepared for the role and the expectations. Councilor Galani, who had previously served on the school board, is a good example. He said, “I came with a set of skills and experience that might have been

more conducive than somebody who had never been in elected office” (December 21, 2018, p. 17). The same was true for Councilor Lagaris, who also had school board experience prior to being elected as a councilor for Eastwood: “So, that [hands-on experience with the school board] was far and away, I would say, the preparation that I relied on more than any kind of formal, academic kind of training” (November 18, 2018, p. 2).

While the participants in this case study had a diverse range of personal and professional experiences prior to becoming elected, one of the councilors indicated that it is the responsibility of candidates who are running and anticipating serving in public office to educate themselves about what the job requires. Councilor Strong had this to say about self-determination: “I think it is up to the candidate to inform themselves about what the position means...what the responsibilities will be” (November 29, 2018, p. 3). She emphasized this point later on in our first interview: “I think it is on the person running to get that information and to make sure they’re up to the job. If you’re applying for a job, you should know what you’re applying for” (November 29, 2018, p. 3). Councilor Reddy was more sympathetic in her assessment of new councilors trying to assimilate. She said, “My sense of observing councilors as they come on is that I think it’s actually harder to get a baseline of information before you’re drawn off to active issues” (November 9, 2018, p. 7). Councilor Lagaris commented on the vast amount of information that needs to be absorbed and the practicality of the average person being able to process it all. Councilor Lagaris said “...it does take a certain amount of awareness, savvy, and education to look through those documents, the budget document,

and make heads or tails of it. And, potentially, the average citizen is not going to have that level of sophistication” (November 18, 2018, p. 15).

The city budget, as Councilor Lagaris alluded to, is a complex document that needs serious study. Six of the seven councilors in the case study all pointed to the importance of understanding the city budget, Councilor Ancher calling it a “critical competency” (January 31, 2019, p. 11). A few of the councilors even pointed to a culture or practice of recommending that the newest member of the council serve as a member of the Finance Committee, so that they could reduce their learning curve with regard to this important piece of council business. Councilor Galani talked about this in our first interview:

...If you had a new councilor, it made sense to put the new councilor on the Finance Committee. If you had two new councilors and you couldn't do that, you put one on. And maybe the next year the other one goes. Because I think that's the place you learn the most about how the city works. (December 21, 2018, p. 15)

Councilor Ancher echoed this sentiment:

Some of us on the council felt that...and this is very relevant, the first committee that someone should serve on is the Finance Committee because the budget is truly the best window to learn about how the city works. And, I mean, I always say “the budget is policy”, so, if someone is intimidated by finance, by financial reporting tools, then they're not going to be as effective of a councilor.

(November 29, 2018, p. 8)

Regardless of prior experience, prior education, or intentional preparation, it is recognized that there is a steep learning curve for newly elected councilors. The time commitment is something that took Councilor Strong by surprise:

I don't think I fully understood that committees could also meet multiple times a month. That I would be serving on boards, that would have subcommittees that they would want me to serve on...and those meetings start to add up. So, that would be (laughs) important information for someone to have in advance.

(November 29, 2018, p. 3)

Campaigning Versus Serving on Council. The participants emphasized that another challenge for newly elected councilors is the gap between the skills needed or used in campaigning for office and those skills which are required to be an effective city councilor. Councilor Ancher elucidated this point well "...there are some people that are really good at campaigning and lousy at governing and vice a versa. Unfortunately, the people that aren't good at campaigning but are good at governing often don't get elected" (November 29, 2018, p. 4). Councilor Lagaris recognized this gap as well, "...there is an unfortunate kind of divide between that [understanding your role as a councilor] and the mechanics of running a campaign" (November 18, 2018, p. 2).

Not only are the characteristics and skills different, but often times, the campaign platform and promises do not line up with the day-to-day policies that the councilors are faced with. Councilor Fortier had this to say: "But, literally – no. I mean, every major issue I've come across, was not a major issue that you campaign on. I mean that's just not the way this job works" (December 17, 2018, p. 4). When I met with Councilor Caldwell, I verified this point once again:

Interviewer: Two very different things. Running the campaign for election and then governing?

Caldwell: That's it, absolutely separate. (December 4, 2018, p. 2)

Relationship Building and Coffee Culture. What becomes evident to newly elected councilors, even before Inauguration Day, is that they are going to be spending a lot of time with their council colleagues. Building relationships is essential as an elected official, especially if policymaking is a priority. You simply cannot get anything through council with just one vote.

After Election Day, currently seated councilors start reaching out to the new councilors to arrange one-on-one coffee meetings to get to know their fellow councilors. Some savvy candidates begin this process while they are campaigning, in an effort to gain insight, but also to get a head start on relationship-building. Nowhere is this written down or prescribed. It is a natural, organic process that is ingrained in the culture of the Eastwood Council.

Councilor Reddy perfectly summarized the importance of this process when she said, "I think being effective is all about building relationships" (November 19, 2018, p. 17). Councilor Ancher also noted the link between being effective and building relationships, "...Assuming you want to be effective, one way to be effective is to develop positive working relationships with your colleagues" (November 29, 2018, p. 12). Councilor Lagaris echoed this sentiment in our second interview: "You can sustain anything that you want to do in the short-term, but in the long-term it's all about the relationships that you have" (February 14, 2019, p. 10). Lagaris expanded on this and pointed to the nature of relationships and the correlation with being effective:

If you nurture those relationships, your colleagues are going to forgive you for all kinds of policy disagreements. If your colleagues start to believe that what you're doing is not really about trying to get the answers or the truth, you just rapidly run out of stuff that you can realistically accomplish. And you can keep rattling the cages, so to speak, but the idea that you're going to get votes to actually change anything is just really difficult. So, I think that's the long-winded way of explaining that, but my first and probably biggest piece of advice is to remember that all organizations are made of people and you need to treat them with respect and you need to build relationships with them and that's what lets you have fuller conversations and that's what lets you get past any particular disagreements about a lot of problems. (February 14, 2019, p. 11)

Councilor Strong, while at first was befuddled by the onslaught of invitations for coffee came to understand the significance of the gesture:

Interviewer: How important is the relationship-building process in becoming a more effective member of council?

Strong: Incredibly important. You need to have a relationship with your fellow councilors and it needs to be a relationship of trust and respect. And when you have that foundation, you can disagree, you can debate, you can vote on opposite sides of an issue and you can move forward because you have that foundation.

But if you don't develop a relationship, you might tend to see someone just based on how they vote on an issue and if they are in disagreement with you, it could begin to create a polarization, which is not helpful because no one is monolithic in their thinking. They may be leaning one way on an issue and then leaning another

way on the next and it's important that you come to each vote fresh, ready to listen. So, you need that basic foundation so that you're able to do that over and over and over again and not have it rocked by one contentious vote.

Interviewer: So, relationship building is part of this onboarding process in some ways?

Strong: Yes, it is. And I think that's so key. I remember telling you in my first interview that I didn't understand why they were all inviting me out for coffee because I just assumed that we'd all be spending a lot of time together, but it's helpful to meet one another as people before you begin to debate issues because that does put that foundation in place that you can then tackle issues together with, and disagree, and still be able to talk. (January 31, 2019, p. 5)

While relationship-building was holistically recognized as an important practice, there are challenges along the way. Councilor Caldwell addressed these in our second interview.

...To me, being really effective in this job and this is totally off-topic, but it's about relationships. It's critical. And our Sunshine Laws and how busy our councilors are with their full-time jobs during the day, those two things, inhibit relationship building. (January 30, 2019, p. 12)

What Councilor Caldwell is referring to is a law that prohibits three or more councilors from meeting without first noticing the public and inviting the public to participate. The law was created with good intentions, but it has also had negative consequences.

Councilor Galani recalled the days before Sunshine Laws were enacted when all the councilors would gather at a local restaurant after a meeting and just have casual

conversations, not pertaining to council business. Manager Issac echoed this when we sat down together: “I know in a different time, the council used to socialize a lot more together. You know, I’ll hear Councilor Galani talk about twenty, thirty years ago, they all used to go out to get [dinner] together” (February 19, 2019, p. 8).

Relationship-building is a fundamental element to ensure effectiveness, to build rapport, and to navigate the council culture. While there are hurdles, such as state laws and personal time constraints, prioritizing getting to know your council colleagues is viewed as essential by the Eastwood councilors.

Emotional Intelligence. Emotional intelligence was identified by the participants as another trait that helps in the relationship-building process and can also positively impact one’s effectiveness on the council. In the absence of emotional intelligence, the implications range from decreased productivity and missed deadlines to decreased productivity and retention (Goleman, 1995). Emotional intelligence is particularly important in a group setting: “The single most important element in group intelligence, it turns out, is not the average IQ in the academic sense, but rather in terms of emotional intelligence” (Goleman, 1995, p. 160). Whereas the nature of a council is working together, emotional intelligence is an asset.

Difficult issues arise regularly for elected officials, who are required to make decisions on policy issues that affect every resident in the municipality, as well as those that work in and visit the town or city. Not every resident or voter agrees with the council’s decisions. Navigating these waters can be difficult, but some councilors argued that emotional intelligence can help. Councilor Lagaris stated, “I think you need to have the patience and sort of the emotional intelligence to not be upset by that [the fact that

you will have substantive disagreements with people] or to not take that personally” (November 18, 2018, p. 3).

Councilor Reddy uses emotional intelligence as a way to take the temperature of a situation and then find a way forward:

You can see a pattern and predict which councilors are likely to start out...that are just starting out in the same place and which councilors are like this (gestures with hands wide apart) and then figure out, with emotional intelligence, figure out, first, what you agree on and is there some common ground here? (November 9, 2018, p. 11)

Emotional intelligence can also be used to ratchet-down an escalating debate, which can be a useful tool in a tense situation. Former Councilor Ancher commented that:

The mark of a good elected official is *that*. When it's their turn to speak, they don't ramp it up, they actually can de-escalate. And, you know, some councilors are very good at doing that and others aren't. And I think that the rhetoric, the language you use, the tone that you use...you know, when everyone else is getting hot, people should say “Okay, maybe that's a good time for me to think about how to notch it down a little bit”. So, I think that's also an important part about, if I want to be effective. (November 29, 2018, p. 13)

Emotional intelligence, by the Eastwood councilor's account, is a positive addition to the characteristics that can be honed and developed by council colleagues. As a trait, emotional intelligence can help councilors to navigate difficult situations, both with constituents and with fellow councilors.

An essential part of the onboarding process, as highlighted by the participants, is the self-initiated act of building relationships. Whether it is one-on-one over coffee or behind the dais, forming relationships enables councilors to better communicate and to move quickly through disagreements to find common ground.

Information and Communication. One of the biggest challenges, as described by the case study participants, is the sheer abundance of information they are given. The timeliness and accessibility of the information is an additional element that causes frustration and is perceived as slowing down the policy-making process. One area of improvement that was identified involved making the City's website more intuitive to navigate. While the information shared with the council by executive staff and other departments in the lead-up to council meetings can be overwhelming, the councilors also cited constituent feedback as both abundant and frequently occurring.

Timeliness, Abundance, and Accessibility of Information. Councilor Strong put it simply, "I mean, it's a bit overwhelming. You get elected and then 'whoosh' there's all this information" (January 31, 2019, p.4). The abundance, timeliness, and accessibility of information are all major hurdles to making well-informed, timely decisions that are transparent and thoroughly considered. Councilor Caldwell was very pointed in her assessment of this problem:

Interviewer: You've mentioned the size of the packets that come to you as a city councilor and the timing of receiving those materials. And that can make for some difficult information absorption and nimble decision-making?

Caldwell: Yeah. And the fact that they put it out Wednesday night mostly doesn't help, because by the time you get it, it's the weekend when you can look at it...or

Monday, you know? Sometimes they put it out Thursday. That doesn't bother me. When they don't get the materials out for committees...y'know, it's a Monday meeting and they don't get the materials out until Saturday morning...that kind of, to me, from the public process standpoint, is too short. (December 4, 2018, p. 13)

Councilor Lagaris also commented on the short timeline and how that can also cause turbulence with the public who perceives that the council is getting information before they do:

So sometimes they [the public's complaints] have merit and sometimes I don't think they have merit...and it's like, well, that's *actually* when the materials were ready. Would it have been great, yes, if...I agree...if everything could have been prepped a week out, but I can swear to you that the people voting on this didn't have any additional access that you didn't have. Like, no decisions are being made behind the scenes. No one has any insider knowledge. They [the council packets] really weren't ready to go until Friday afternoon, so...[shrugs].

(November 18, 2018, p. 14)

And it is not just the timeliness of the information, but how it is presented by staff that is sometimes problematic. Councilor Lagaris described it this way:

...Sometimes I'm like, "I'm not sure if you're doing this on purpose, but you're drowning us in information here, so no one's going to suggest that you're not sharing the data, but we're asking a much simpler, but higher-level kind of question. Like, so out of a one hundred and seventy page budget, out of all these tens of thousands of line items and stuff...tell me, what was in the last version of

this and what is not in the current version of this and vice-a-versa. What is in the new version?”. (November 18, 2018, p. 15)

There is a strong desire for clarity, transparency, and distilling the information down to the most pertinent and digestible bits. When time is of the essence and decisions need to be made, the preference is for brevity and clarity rather than quantity.

The City of Eastwood’s Website. The City of Eastwood’s website was identified by the participants as being difficult to navigate and, when trying to find specific information, not intuitive. What that means for both the councilors and the public is that information is not readily accessible. From a transparency standpoint, this is problematic. Councilor Caldwell had this humorous anecdote to share about this struggle:

It used to be that information would live in a town hall and you could go in and request it, right? Nothing was very publicly accessible. You really had to show up and ask somebody to see it and sort of admit you wanted to see it, right? Now, a lot of things are available on the web. There’s still plenty of things that would be internal documents that, if you put in a request to see it, you could, but there’s just no place to see everything. So, information is so much more accessible than it used to be. And yet, there’s still plenty of information that you can bank on exists and would be, under the law, considered public, but is it – accessible? And then, of course, you deal with issues of language barriers and whether you have access to a computer and that piece of accessibility but, assuming you have all that...finding what you want on there [the city’s website]...sometimes I’m like “Where the heck is this? My God, I know there was something about this – I

thought there was a special page on this shelter-planning stuff. Where the heck is it?!”. And I’m looking around trying to find it and...I’m on the HHS Committee, like, “Where is it?!”. (December 4, 2018, p. 19)

Councilor Strong agreed that the website can be challenging for the average person:

Interviewer: And for the average person, the city website is not easy to navigate to find information?

Strong: I think that’s true. I think it’s because there is so much information. It’s all there. (Laughs) It’s all there, but there is SO much. There are so many headings that what you are looking for might be under. There is a search box and it generally does a pretty good job of bringing up what you’re looking for. I don’t know how to improve that. There’s just so much to do. The only way someone’s going to get good at it is to continue to navigate. Once you kind of have the basic structure down, it’s not bad. I think people are intimidated by it. (January 31, 2019, p. 3)

Councilor Caldwell just wants to ensure that transparency is a priority with regards to access to information and that it is an even playing field: “From my own view of it, I should see what the public is seeing. And if it’s difficult to navigate, I should see that”. (December 4, 2018, p. 18).

Constituent Feedback. While feedback is included in my Conceptual Framework, for the purposes of the councilors’ onboarding, as they experience it, the additional categorization of feedback as it relates to abundance of information was both relevant and applicable. Hence, the inclusion of constituent feedback in this section where we analyze the multitude of ways in which newly elected councilors receive

information. Constituent feedback poses a unique challenge as it is often received real-time and in-person or via the councilors' official city email. Navigating these situations can be difficult and communication should be handled with particular care. For the person who is new to public service, how and when to respond can be a challenge. With Freedom of Access laws, it is of the utmost importance that digital communication, both through email and social media, be approached with the highest standard of professionalism.

In our second interview, Councilor Reddy explained that she can expect to be recognized when she is out in the community and that people will approach her to share information: "People bother me (laughs) at the supermarket, at the coffee shop – that's okay" (January 24, 2019, p.7). Not only are councilors receiving constituent feedback in-person, it also arrives in their inbox daily. Councilor Galani quipped, "We get inundated with email" (December 21, 2018, p.7). Councilor Galani expanded on this later:

...Because you get feedback all the time. I mean, sometimes it's an email...or you're in [the grocery store] or [the pharmacy] and someone stops you and they tell you they think you're doing a good job or they tell you they think you're doing a terrible job. Or even though they agree with you on a lot of stuff, they didn't agree with you on whatever the issue was. So, I think you get, or I get that type of feedback often. It's not solicited feedback usually and it's not formal feedback. (December 21, 2018, p. 8)

Councilor Strong agrees:

Interviewer: And how do you get feedback – about your role and your performance as a councilor? Is that – mainly from your constituents?

Strong: Yeah, I would say constituents and that's *freely* given. (November 29, 2018, p. 11)

Especially in smaller communities, the councilors, who are very public figures, are recognized nearly everywhere they go, even running everyday errands, as Councilor Galani mentioned. This additional level of accessibility increases the likelihood of receiving feedback in very nontraditional ways. And the feedback is not always positive, says Councilor Ancher:

They're [newly elected councilors] not prepared to be in certain situations and, especially in this day and age, public criticism can be scathing and inappropriate and, y'know... who's prepared to handle that if you haven't had to experience that in your previous life to date? (November 29, 2018, p. 3)

Ancher continued by saying,

Part of being an elected official is providing good customer service. It's like being on the end of the 1-800 complaint line. But again, some people don't envision that when they run for office. They think they're gonna be, y'know, giving nationally televised speeches and pontificating on health care policy because that's what motivated them to run. (November 29, 2018, p. 6)

Not only do councilors receive feedback face-to-face and via email, but also on social media platforms. When asked specifically if training on social media and email communications would be helpful, Councilor Fortier said, "I think that may be something that people could use some help on. I don't think you're ever ready for the criticism" (January 25, 2019, p. 6). Councilor Galani also felt it would be helpful, especially as a way to urge caution in communications:

So, I think that that piece, y’know there are laws around it, but just being mindful and thoughtful about how you communicate. Not only to constituents, but also to colleagues or to staff because it can come back to haunt you if you just fire off something that probably doesn’t need to be written. (December 21, 2018, p. 13)

Former Councilor Ancher was much more pointed in his assessment:

Again, if I want to be effective as a councilor – if I can work more effectively and develop a positive relationship with the media, then I’ll probably be a more effective councilor and I’ll probably cause less headaches, frankly, for my colleagues on the council and for city staff, if they don’t have to clean up messes every time Ancher opens his mouth. (November 29, 2018, p. 17)

Councilors are on the receiving end of a never-ending stream of information.

Council packets contain hundreds of pages of detailed information. Constituent feedback is constant and sometimes scathing. The participants recognize these challenges, but throughout the interviews did not identify any specific support that they receive through the onboarding process to meet these challenges head-on and with confidence.

Roles and Power. Navigating a new organizational culture can be vexing. Some questions that may emerge around roles and power include: Who is in charge? What are the proper channels and processes for accomplishing tasks? What influence do I have? What is my place in the organization and the process? For newly elected city councilors, who are faced with a steep learning curve, navigating roles and power may be one of the biggest challenges they face, though, in the words of Councilor Ancher, “knowing your role is obviously critically important” (November 29, 2018, p. 7). With a City Manager in charge of the day-to-day operations, a Mayor who is tasked with strategic goal setting

for the council, and eight councilors representing a broad range of constituencies, the labyrinthine nature of understanding one's role can be hard to define. No one is more aware of this challenge than City Manager Isaac:

You know, we do not have a strong mayor form of government here where the mayor and the city council make the operational decisions and so, sometimes, at least my experience has been, individuals come in thinking they have a lot more control or responsibility over day-to-day operations, which of course they don't – based upon the charter of the city. That is a challenge, to make sure that all of us understand our unique roles for the city. (February 19, 2019, p. 2)

Manager Isaac is not alone in thinking that there is a gap in this understanding. In my first interview with Councilor Reddy, she was very pointed in highlighting the bright line between council and staff. Whereas the Council hires, manages, and reviews the City Manager, the city staff is firmly under the management and direction of the City Manager, not the Council. As Councilor Reddy noted:

Council roles and responsibilities and how you interact with...how the elected interact with the Manager because our system is...it's not unique to Eastwood that we have the Mayor-Council model. So, we really need to be clear, and I think we are, it's just that councilors don't care. Some councilors just don't...they lack...I have seen a number of councilors come through and a number of councilors who currently sit who lack experience in an environment where they are managing people and they have the misimpression that when they are elected to council they are elected as one of nine bosses for anyone who happens to work for the city; from the guys in Parks and Rec to the Manager. And we don't – *nobody* in city

government reports to us other than the city manager or our direct appointees.

And that's an area of constant reminder. And then you start all over again when the councilor changes or when the Manager changes. (November 9, 2018, p. 3)

Councilor Galani is a little more sympathetic to the plight of newly elected councilors in trying to navigate these waters: "I think that's a tricky thing, particularly for new elected officials who haven't been involved in some way on boards or commissions...you know, to try to know your role" (December 21, 2018, p. 5).

At least one councilor, Rachel Strong, feels that there is a document that defines roles. Councilor Strong points to the Charter as that document:

The Charter lays out the task of government and the way the government functions and the role of the government and the role of the City Manager and the role of the School board in relationship to the Council. So, these are all important relationships to understand, so that you know what is within your purview and what is not. (November 29, 2018, p. 3)

While the Charter may spell it out that does not necessarily mean it is clear. Councilor Caldwell suggested that the document can be left up to interpretation: "People refer to it and have different understandings of it, I think, but it is our governing document, our foundational document as a city" (December 4, 2018, p. 2).

Councilor Aggrey shared his frustrations about the lack of clarity, "I don't know what I can ask [corporation counsel] to do and what I cannot...and nobody tells you that from the beginning" (November 7, 2018, p. 15). Councilor Reddy highlighted the importance of understanding this relationship: "That's another sensitive relationship that the councilors need to understand that Corporation Counsel is not your personal lawyer

as an individual councilor Corporation Counsel represents the city entity” (November 9, 2018, p. 4). In addition to the relationship with Corporation Counsel, Councilor Reddy understands that the relationship between both the school board and the council and the planning board and the council should be made clearer:

A key would have been sitting down with the planning staff, you know, understanding all of those zoning and planning issues that are gonna come to the council, that the council weighs in on – the difference between the council’s role and the planning board’s role. (November 9, 2018, p. 5)

She added, “I think that’s [the relationship between the city council and the school board and how the budgets interplay] a particular area where we should have more orientation” (November 9, 2018, p. 20).

Understanding the council’s role is broader than just how the councilors interact with one another, the mayor, and the City Manager. The Council’s other direct hires, the City Clerk and Corporation Counsel, must also be considered. How the council relates to and works with the school board and the zoning board is essential knowledge. For some participants, how councilors should be and are allowed to interact with city staff remains unclear. The lack of clarity could signal an opportunity for enhancements to the onboarding process.

Process. Part of negotiating an individual’s role and power within an organization lies in becoming familiar with processes that are essential to one’s role. In the case of the Eastwood council, the case study participants identified a need to understand how proposals are brought to the council and how discussions evolve from an idea to being accepted into the local code of ordinances.

Understanding this process is essential to executing the business of the council, though, according to Eastwood councilors, this process is not always well understood or consistent. Rather than having a rigid process, there is a preference for flexibility, so that the council can remain nimble. Two of the main documents that guide council process are Robert's Rules of Order and the established Eastwood Council Rules. The council rules are reviewed and updated regularly and are voted on by the Eastwood Council itself.

At first, Councilor Strong thought that the council process was a little arduous, but soon realized that the council rules and the pace of discussion at council meetings provided the basis for the council culture:

At first, after my first few meetings in the council, my initial impression was "Wow, this process inhibits conversation among us. It inhibits us getting to the meat of issues". But, it didn't take long for me to change my opinion on that and realizing that in forcing me and others to sit and listen to what someone else is saying, you actually do get to the meat of issues...probably more quickly because people wind up saying exactly what they want to say. And you get a chance to respond, but you have to wait and you have to sit and you have to think and that's kind of a good thing to enforce because I think so often people are, instead of listening, already rehearsing their response or just waiting to get their word in, but if you know, well... "I'm going to get my chance. So, I'll gather my ideas and put it all out there and listen and be able to respond" it...I think it's a really good format. And it does create the culture of the council. (November 29, 2018, p. 6)

For Councilor Caldwell, understanding the process was essential:

And I put a lot of time into it this first year, to try and go to all of the meetings...so that I could try to learn the process a little bit. For me, budget and finance issues at the city level are one of my core issues. And for me, in order to learn enough about the budget to try to understand... understand it so that hopefully I can be effective on those issues over the three-year term, I needed to do that. (December 4, 2018, p. 3)

However, despite all of her efforts, Caldwell found that there are many aspects of the process that are not documented in the council rules and may not be able to be documented formally:

You know, the rules really deal with the formal process in the public meeting. Which is a part of what we do and then there's all the other interactions, that are just totally interpersonal and there's just no making rules around them. Sometimes I wish there was. And that's just, the messiness of strong-willed human beings trying to work together. (December 4, 2018, p. 5)

In our second interview, Councilor Caldwell again pointed to the lack of clarity in the council process, specifically how issues get brought before council:

Interviewer: ...You wanted to get a sense of what are the hot topics, but important to you was making sure that the process of how things moved through council committees and to council...and then also the city budget piece...you wanted to understand, but you were taking the initiative to attend the meetings so that you were understanding that –

Caldwell: Yeah, that's it. And, at the end of the day, you would think the process would be all well laid out, clear on any case, but it's not. (January 30, 2019, p. 4)

When I asked Councilor Caldwell if a formal process were going to be documented, where that information should live, she specifically pointed to the Council Rules (January 30, 2019, p. 4).

Describing and documenting the council process is not as easy as one might think. As Councilor Lagaris pointed out, the process can vary, depending on who you ask:

Maybe a different way of putting it is just the deeper kind of more important norms about how you conduct your business generally and how you bring up issues and deal with them...is much more informal because of that [the size of the council], you know? There's still only nine people, so there's only so many relationships to go around. And therefore, it tends to be a more accommodating, more informal back-and-forth way of dealing with that. Which, I think you get a sense of, but if you really try...if you went to everyone and said "write down what you think the process is", then it would look all over the place, even though ninety-five percent of the time we are all totally on the same page. You know? That's probably the best way I can put it. (February 14, 2019, p. 5)

Regardless of how closely the informal process follows the process that is laid out in public view, it is seen as critically important to adhere to. Councilor Ancher observed, In this day and age especially, if an individual or group doesn't like an outcome, the first thing they'll do is challenge the process. So, it's more important than ever, if you want your decisions to survive, you actually have to use good process to get there. (November 29, 2018, p. 10)

The first step to using a better process is to explain it in a way that is easily understood. Councilor Ancher emphasized the need for taking more time to provide a thorough review of the process and council rules to new councilors:

So, I think that for someone to go through it [council process] in a more dynamic way, I think would really, really improve – and you see Councilors, some of them at the very beginning are completely flummoxed by the process and they basically sit there with the deer in the headlights look and they may have input that they'd like to provide, but they don't even know how to do it. And when, adults especially, find themselves in a public environment where they are unsure of how to do something, they tend not to be willing to put themselves out there.

(November 29, 2018, p. 10)

Process is important. So are the documentation, understanding, and implementation of that process in a way that is transparent and wholly understood. The participants' feedback strongly supports a need for the rules to reflect the actual process as it is applied, so that the councilors have a better understanding of how to use that process to be effective policy makers and public servants.

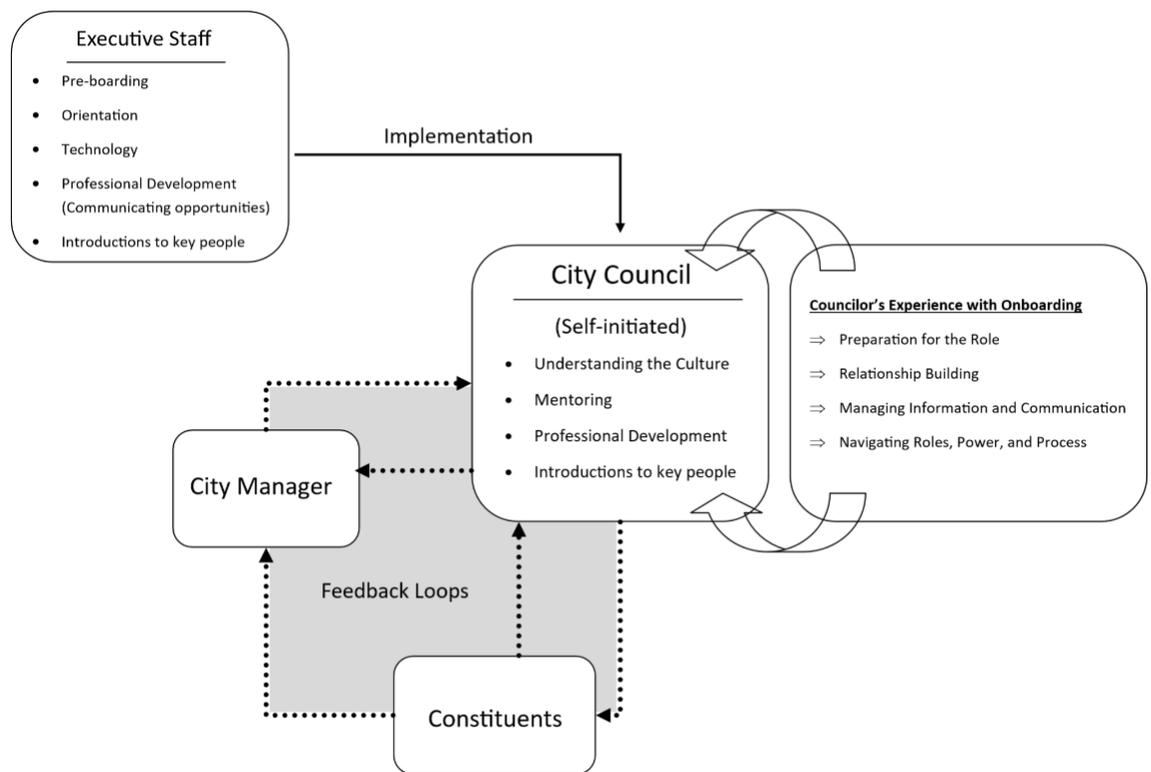
In addition to the elements included in my Conceptual Framework, there are also essential aspects of the onboarding process that were brought to light by the case study participants. Preparation for the role was identified as essential for reducing the time-to-proficiency for newly elected councilors. The councilors emphasized the importance of relationship-building and emotional intelligence in increasing the efficacy of policymakers. Information overload was cited as a huge hurdle to decision-making, with timeliness and abundance of information being the two main challenges. Pertaining to

communication and information, feedback from constituents in real-time and through various channels posed an additional challenge. Navigating the organizational culture through better understanding the nuances of roles, power, and process emerged as a critical competency and an area of opportunity for future onboarding.

Figure 3 *Participants’ Experience with Onboarding in Eastwood* incorporates the councilors’ *experience* with the onboarding process into their shared *perspectives* on the Conceptual Framework as it is implemented in Eastwood, either by the city’s executive staff or through self-initiated processes.

Figure 3

Participants’ Experience with Onboarding in Eastwood



The model above incorporates Figure 2 *Participants' Perspectives on the Conceptual Framework* and adds themes that emerged through In Vivo coding.

Additional elements that are self-initiated and fall outside of my original Conceptual Framework are shown here as part of the experience of councilors in Eastwood.

Research Question Two: What are the Public Policy Implications in the Absence of an Onboarding Program?

As the literature review revealed, onboarding is a critically important process for equipping people with the information, skills, and support that they need to do a job and to do it well. Former Councilor Ancher emphasized why providing training and support is just as important for elected officials as it is for anyone else: “You want your doctor to be competent and your lawyer to be competent. Why wouldn’t you want your elected officials to be competent?” (January 31, 2019, p. 13).

Having established the many benefits of onboarding, it is also important to understand the consequences when an onboarding program is not present or is not implemented well. The second research question sought to uncover the negative externalities that might result in the absence of onboarding locally elected officials.

In the first set of interviews, I attempted to ask the question more indirectly, by prompting councilors to recall a mistake that they or one of their colleagues had made. While I did get some very powerful responses, the question remained mostly unanswered. During the second round of interviews, I changed my approach and asked the question directly. The participants identified the following public policy implications in the absence of best-practices onboarding: mistakes, not understanding policy implications of decisions, a slow learning curve, damage to image or reputation, and reduced efficiency.

While I discuss these five areas below, the findings are not as robust as I had hoped but are still worthy of discussion.

Mistakes

Perhaps one of the most revelatory statements made by a participant when asked about public policy implications in the absence of best-practices onboarding was in my second interview with Councilor Fortier: “I would say probably more mistakes...and I would say the mistakes would arise from lack of information, lack of understanding, lack of seeing the bigger picture...” (January 25, 2019, p. 8). Mistakes can also arise from a lack of comprehension of the monumental task that lies ahead or the lack of fit for the task ahead. Former Council Ancher said, “I’ve seen people run for office and really with no clear idea or a completely wrong idea, an inaccurate sense of what they’re getting themselves into” (November 29, 2018, p. 1).

Not Understanding Policy Implications of Decisions

In addition to making mistakes out of lack of information, poor fit, or a gap in understanding the depth and breadth of councilors’ roles and responsibilities, there are other pitfalls that can arise in the absence of onboarding. Councilor Lagaris summarized the potential negative consequences best when he said, “I think the risk is obviously, you can make policy without really understanding the implications of it” (February 14, 2019, p. 10). Councilor Fortier expanded on the notion of the negative repercussions for local policy in our second interview:

Interviewer: So, the progress of public policy initiatives would be dramatically hindered or slowed?

Fortier: Yeah, I definitely think so. I think all of this would lead to you being less effective for your constituents. (January 25, 2019, p. 8)

Slow Learning Curve

Council business continues through the months of elections and inauguration, so there is no time to pause and take stock before being required to absorb information and weigh-in on proposed policies. Councilor Lagaris commented on this slow learning curve for newly elected officials:

You know, I think there is a risk that it can take you a very long time to come up to speed. I think that's the biggest risk...is just that you can feel totally out of your element for an extended period of time with no clear path for how to get the information that would help you feel up to speed. (February 14, 2019, p. 9)

Councilor Aggrey also noted that the learning curve can be steep and the consequences very real,

“Well, one [consequence] is that they [newly elected councilors] will have to learn on their own. And we all know that different people have different learning skills or abilities. So, it doesn't matter how that councilor is, or who that councilor is, if they have never had prior experience in legislation, then they have to learn. For some, it will take a year, for some it will take two years. What it means is that, you may end up finishing your first term doing nothing. And just being there and not understanding how to engage or how to bring something forward or how to...of course, you will raise your hand and ask questions, but I think you will be more effective if that part of the process is already in place. Then you have some sort of exposure to what it is that you are getting yourself

into. And, you know what that means, because if you are sitting there and there is a conversation about let's say, zoning, and I have no idea what is being said or I have no idea what the process is, I might end up voting for something that just sounds good. And the implication is – we all know what the implication means.”

(February 12, 2019, p. 9)

Damage to Image or Reputation

While the councilors are debating the details of the public policy issues before them at council and committee meetings, the public is watching. If an elected official is unprepared, does not understand the process, or makes a mistake, the public is not only going to witness it unfolding, but there is a very real possibility that it will affect their view of or confidence in the elected officials and in their local government. Former Councilor Ancher provided his take on the potential pitfalls of a lack of a robust onboarding program and how that can impact people's view of local government:

Well, I think it can lead to, from the citizen's standpoint, a loss of respect for elected officials because they don't understand that when acting as an elected official you're not just representing yourself, but you're representing you're community. You're representing, frankly - the system of governance.

(November 29, 2018, p. 3)

Councilor Reddy echoed Ancher when she said, “People lose faith in the process. They'll lose faith in the council, in their own government, and their ability to influence what is going on. And I just think that is so important at the municipal level” (January 24, 2019, p. 7). Councilor Galani sees a role for executive staff to play in equipping

elected officials with the skills to better manage their image, by being better public servants to begin with:

I think, to the extent that elected officials and appointed officials, like managers, can see that it's important to help give people tools to – you know, go back to Phil Morse [a previous city manager] – frankly, I think he thought elected officials could make themselves look stupid and, in turn, make the city look stupid and if he could help them with skills or support, so that they didn't do that...I think it's a good thing. (March 4, 2019, p. 10)

Reduced Efficiency

Finally, a very tangible consequence of a lack of a robust onboarding process is the potential for wasting time and money. Former Councilor Ancher emphasized the importance of well-prepared public servants and how that correlates to positive outcomes for the taxpayers, who are the ultimate stakeholder:

It serves us all for them [elected officials] to be effective and efficient because efficiency is important because (a) I don't want my tax dollars wasted and (b) I don't want something that should only take two months, take 22 months because people don't know how to get it done. (January 31, 2019, p. 12)

To some, local government might be viewed as one of the more accessible entry-points for those who are interested in policymaking. Councilor Aggrey would disagree, “So, yeah, municipal government is basic, it's the most primary or basic form of government, but it is also, in my opinion, it's also the most complicated part of government structure” (February 12, 2019, p. 6).

Given the complex nature of local government, the varying skill-sets that elected officials bring to the job, and the potential for negative externalities when a well-planned and customized onboarding program does not exist, there are lessons to be learned from the Eastwood Council.

The findings developed through this qualitative case study reveal that newly elected councilors to the Eastwood City Council are the beneficiaries of a well-structured council orientation but are not currently being delivered a robust onboarding program. While there are elements of onboarding present throughout their first year, including opportunities for professional development and introductions to key people, there is room to improve the way in which the councilors are provided information and tools which will reduce their time to proficiency and help them to be more effective in their new role.

The executive office, including the City Manager, City Clerk, and Corporation Counsel, are perceived as doing a good job in delivering a baseline of information to the councilors before they are presented with myriad policies to consider. However, there is an opportunity to involve the council more in the council's own onboarding process, both in the design and implementation.

As much of the onboarding experience is self-initiated by the councilors themselves, there is direct and lived experience that could inform the development of a more holistic and intentional process. In Chapter Five, I consider the ways in which the onboarding process could be improved, which will not only benefit the city councilors themselves, but also the city staff in Eastwood, and the residents and constituents that they serve.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In Chapter One, I made the case for why onboarding is vital, not only in the private sector, but also in the nonprofit and public sectors. Onboarding, which is a process, rather than an event, reduces time to proficiency, increases the likelihood that an individual will be successful in their role, and the process provides an opportunity for the new recruit to understand the culture of the organization. Gaps in research were identified in Chapter Two, specifically the lack of academic research focused on onboarding programs for locally elected officials.

Understanding how locally elected officials learn their roles is crucial in creating onboarding programs that will enable these individuals to be more prepared for the demands that come with being a public servant. Using my literature review, I developed a Conceptual Framework which provided the foundation for my interviews and data analysis. In Chapter Three, I documented my research design for this qualitative case study that is focused on a local council in the northeast United States. In Chapter Four, I presented my findings about how the Eastwood Council experiences onboarding and to what extent onboarding is provided to newly elected city councilors. While the findings did convey the presence of some best-practices elements, Eastwood does not yet have a complete and comprehensive onboarding program that would best support the newly elected councilors.

The participants agreed that the orientation was thorough and they all experienced communication from executive staff during pre-boarding. While there is not a formal mentoring program, many of the councilors sought out mentors on their own. Professional development was by and large the most successful element, as it is both

viewed by the participants as essential and all are taking advantage of opportunities to increase their skills and knowledge in the realm of local governance and public policy.

The most important discovery was that, as opposed to the onboarding being solely delivered by executive staff as it might be in a private sector model, the councilors themselves are actively taking part in their onboarding process through relationship building and getting familiar with council culture. In Vivo coding further revealed aspects of onboarding that underscore the complex environment to which the councilors must adapt in order to be successful. Understanding roles, power and process was referred to again and again by participants as critical to getting things done. In many instances, the City of Eastwood is doing well in supporting newly elected city councilors as they acclimate. Yet, there is still ample room to improve the current onboarding process.

In this chapter, I synthesize existing research on best-practices elements with the case study findings to provide the basis for recommendations. The recommendations apply to the Eastwood Council, as well as other local and regional councils that could benefit from my findings. The findings revealed great opportunities for further research, which will also be discussed later on in this chapter.

Discussion

Elected officials face particular hurdles with regards to time-constraints, public scrutiny, and preparedness for the role, as we learned in Chapter Four. Councilor Fortier talked about these challenges in our first interview. In reference to public scrutiny, he said “This is the balance that comes with being an elected official. I think every single aspect of our life is scrutinized” (December 17, 2018, p. 11). Councilor Fortier also

acknowledged that he was perhaps not fully prepared for the task ahead, "...I didn't really know anything about local government aside from being involved in different campaigns" (December 17, 2018, p. 3).

Feld and Lutz (1972) noted the varying levels of both education and type of occupation of candidates for Houston City Council and the Texas State Legislature in their 1972 study. In the study, they found that, compared to candidates for the Legislature, "Council candidates tended to have far less experience" (1972, p. 930). Hebert (1962) concluded that "political officials in the U.S. emerge from all levels of the social structure" (p. 709). Coghill, et al. (2009) found that parliamentarians have varied levels of skills and professional experience. Similarly, Grenier and Mévellec (2016) made the same point about LEOs in Quebec. Across all levels of government, there continue to be individuals who come to their roles needing additional training and support in order to be effective. Onboarding can help bridge the gap in the knowledge that newly elected officials have with respect to the vast amount of information that they need to absorb. The onboarding process also helps newly elected officials better navigate their new roles and responsibilities.

While municipal staff cannot vet newcomers ahead of time, as is common in the private sector, they can do their best to prepare the elected officials for what lies ahead. As Councilor Ancher so aptly put it in our second interview, "if all I have is a very limited amount of time to put into being a city councilor, it supports the notion that an investment of both my time and the city's time in making me be as efficient and effective as possible is exactly what should be done" (January 31, 2019, p. 9). Reflecting on parliamentarians, Coghill, Holland and Donahue (2008) assert that,

Election to parliament does not come after years of training and socialisation during which certain value systems can be developed and imbued over years of study and practice, such as happens with doctors and lawyers. Parliamentarians come from a diverse background of values and belief systems as well as life experiences, educational and ability levels. (p. 109)

Essentially, the varied level of skills and experience, while positive in many ways, also underscores the need for onboarding. The responsibilities of an elected official, as we learned in Chapter Two, are both complicated and critically important to the vitality of the communities they serve.

Being prepared is, in part, the responsibility of the individual who has decided to run for an elected position. Councilor Strong said in our first interview, “I think it is up to the candidate to inform themselves about what the position means, what the responsibilities will be,” and she added, “I think it is on the person running to get that information and to make sure they’re up to the job. If you’re applying for a job, you should know what you’re applying for” (November 29, 2018, p. 3).

Ladyga-Block (2007) supports this assertion, “Once elected, the responsibility of each public servant is to further his or her knowledge of the individual office as well as the workings of the other elected offices and departments with which the official will be working” (p. 1). Preparing for the role is incumbent on those considering a run for office, but it is also beneficial to provide additional training and onboarding to the newcomer. Councilor Aggrey pointed this out in our second interview, “Yes, I understand that when you decide to run in city government, you should try to understand the city that you are trying to work in, but there needs to be some sort of formal orientation” (February 12,

2019, p. 5). City staff are the most well-positioned to deliver an onboarding program, as they intimately understand the day-to-day operations of the city and have rich historical knowledge and background on the wide range of policy issues that the councilors will face. The experiences of the participants highlight the opportunity and need for a more well-planned and robust onboarding program. In the words of Councilor Reddy, there is a need to “make it more intentional” (January 24, 2019, p. 1).

From the literature review, I developed a Conceptual Framework that featured best-practices elements for an onboarding program. Much of the current onboarding research is focused on the private sector, with organizations like L’Oréal setting the standard. When it comes to developing onboarding for locally elected officials, there are different considerations, as they come with a wide range of skills that do not necessarily align with the job description. In smaller municipalities especially, elected officials come to their role, not as a full-time position, but in addition to other gainful work. In contrast with the private sector, where the onboarding is delivered by the organization and received by the newcomer that was selected by the organization, in an elected body the relationship is more complex. For example, the Eastwood Council is not ‘hired’ by the executive staff that delivers the onboarding, but rather by the voting public. Additionally, the Eastwood Council hires the City Manager and other executive staff, such as the City Clerk and Corporation Counsel. While these nuances may present a challenge, they also present an opportunity for scholarly work. In a 2016 article, Grenier and Mévellec point to the lack of research in the public sector, saying “training programs for LEOs have largely remained outside of scholarly purview” (p. 35). The case study of the Eastwood

Council adds to, and will hopefully encourage, research in a field with abundant possibilities.

To better understand the Eastwood Council's perspective on my Conceptual Framework, I embedded each element in my interview protocol and referenced each element for my first level of coding. Using this methodology, I determined which elements were being delivered, which were not, and to what degree. Using open-ended questions and In Vivo coding, I identified what aspects of onboarding were unique to the specific case and from there, modified my Conceptual Framework to reflect the findings from the Eastwood Councilors. The new Framework, represented by *Figure 3*, enables the City of Eastwood to tailor an onboarding program to suit the unique experience of the councilors of Eastwood. The updated Conceptual Framework is a blend of the best-practices elements and the unique experience of councilors in Eastwood, and allows for customization, a key feature of successful onboarding. Below, I provide recommendations that may assist in this endeavor.

Findings for research question two did not provide the breadth or depth of results that I had anticipated but did deliver important insights. I recommend further analysis to identify the true cost to the individuals, the organization, and the community in the absence of best-practice onboarding. Generally, what can be concluded from the data is that there are a wide range of policy implications that can result from a lack of a robust onboarding program. Implications, as described by the participants, ranged from making mistakes, to not understanding the implications of policy decisions once applied in real-time. When I asked Councilor Fortier directly what he thought were the implications for public policy in the absence of a robust onboarding program, he said "I would say

probably more mistakes. And I would say the mistakes would arise from lack of information, lack of understanding, lack of seeing the bigger picture” (January 25, 2019, p. 8). To this same question, Councilor Lagaris answered “I think the risk is obviously, you can make policy without really understanding the implications of it” (February 14, 2019, p. 10).

Existing research consistently points to the importance of onboarding. Michele Anderson eloquently summarizes the need to invest in onboarding locally elected officials: “We no longer work in a world where senior leaders can afford to take their time easing into the role. Elected officials promise change and public sector leaders are expected to deliver on a timetable that is not their own” (2017, p. 1). Eastwood is not immune from this pressure, as the community faces many challenges similar to other municipalities of its size: stretched resources, demand for workforce, aging infrastructure, and a growing need for more housing and public transportation. In the research report conducted by Foster-Thompson and Beal (2009) for the United States Army, they outline the potential pitfalls if onboarding is lacking:

Leaders who take action in the absence of a solid understanding of the organizational culture, a well-developed network, and/or a clear grasp of the nuances of their new leadership role are prone to political and interpersonal missteps. (p. 5)

Demands throughout the first year pull the councilors in many directions, but a well-designed onboarding program is an opportunity to keep them grounded and provide the support they need to tackle major public policy issues and build rapport in the community. It is also incumbent on the city’s executive staff to provide an onboarding

program that supports the councilors to help them avoid costly mistakes, while integrating them into the culture of the organization. Bradt (2010) recognizes the symbiotic relationship between individuals within an organization and the organization itself. An investment in the individuals pays dividends for the organization of which they are a part.

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Recommendation One: Develop a Customized Onboarding Program for the Eastwood Council

Simply stated, organizations that engage in formal onboarding are more effective than those that do not (Bauer, 2010). Based on the findings, Eastwood Council does not currently have an onboarding program with best-practices elements in place. They do have a council orientation, which is viewed favorably by the majority of the participants. Eastwood Council would benefit from a customized onboarding program, using my updated Conceptual Framework as a guide. Given that onboarding increases effectiveness and reduces time to proficiency, the benefits are many and the risks, few.

Customization. Customization is the key to a successful onboarding program (Byford, et al., 2017, Foster-Thompson & Beal, 2009, Graybill, et al, 2012, Grillo & Kim, 2015, Ndunguru, 2012, Pike, 2014). The participants recognized this immediately and intuitively. Councilor Fortier put it succinctly when he said, “It’s so different for every person” (January 25, 2019, p. 5). Councilor Lagaris posited, “Obviously there’s sort of a baseline where you’re going to want to get some introduction to the fire department, the police department, and the planning department, but beyond that, it really needs to be tailored to the individuals” (February 14, 2019, p. 9). Former Councilor

Ancher summarized the need for customization succinctly, “it’s really coming up with an individualized learning plan for each councilor” (January 31, 2019, p. 7).

Development and Oversight of Program. The preference of participants is to make the onboarding program recommended or optional, with the one exception being FOAA training, since it is required by state law. The program would be developed by the City Manager’s office and executive staff, together with the Mayor’s Office and staff. Council would have a role as a partner in the process, both through informing the design and delivery, as well as ensuring that new councilors are being provided the opportunities to participate in the program on offer.

Participants expressed the importance of keeping onboarding within the purview of the Manager’s office. Councilor Strong made a salient point about why that would be best,

Interviewer: So, maybe the manager’s office is still the best facilitator?

Strong: I do think so because it is apolitical. It’s really about the business of the city and how the city runs. And councilors need to know that, so that they can offer the vision that is realistic considering how the city operates (January 31, 2019, p. 5).

While the common theme that emerged was that the executive staff should implement the process, there was also a desire to have the councilors more involved in what that process might look like in the future. During our second interview, Councilor Reddy commented, “I think the council has some responsibility for protecting the council process and how the council performs” (January 24, 2019, p. 6).

The Rules and Reports Committee was identified as well-suited to play a role in the development and oversight of an onboarding program. The committee, which regularly reviews the council rules, as well as the council's hired staff (City Manager, Corporation Counsel, and City Clerk), would have oversight responsibility for the program and would check-in with newly elected city councilors to ensure the program is being implemented and that newcomers are feeling well-integrated and prepared for their roles.

The current process for preparing newly elected city councilors lies under the purview of the executive office, meaning that council's staff (City Manager, Corporation Counsel, and City Clerk) is largely responsible for planning and implementing the orientation, along with other assigned city staff. The findings support the continuation of the executive staff in implementing many elements of the onboarding process, with input from council in the design and oversight.

Front-loading the Onboarding. Based on the short time horizon for elected officials (some serving only one term if not re-elected), the onboarding program should be compressed for LEOs in order to reduce time to proficiency and maximize the councilors' time and effectiveness on the council. There is an opportunity to be more strategic about when orientation is scheduled, perhaps even during the weeks directly following Election Day. An exchange between Councilor Reddy and I highlights this opportunity,

Interviewer: So, how critical do you think that window of opportunity is, between Election Day and swearing in, for providing information on onboarding?

Reddy: Oh! I think it is a perfect time to be providing the information. It's nearly a month before the councilor is sworn in. They're already spending a lot of time during that month trying to figure out...okay, now that I got what I asked for, what do I do with it? And I think to not use that month is really a lost opportunity.

(January 24, 2019, p. 9)

Front-loading the onboarding will also help to reduce potential pitfalls. In our second interview, Councilor Fortier identified the time period when the most mistakes are made, "I think your first couple of months are important. I mean, that's when you'll make the most mistakes" (January 25, 2019, p. 8).

While an onboarding program is an ongoing process that can span up to a year, "the first 30 days matter the most," according to Jo Hillman of Noel-Levitz, Inc, a higher education consulting firm (2010, p. 2). Furthermore, Hillman states "building a quick and full integration is of high potential benefit" (2010, p. 2). Foster-Thompson and Beal (2009) echo the importance of front-loading onboarding: "Missteps are particularly problematic when committed early on. The first few months on the job represent a critical time period during which the leader's reputation within the new organization is cemented" (p. 5).

Two challenges need to be considered when developing the customized program: (1) the time commitment required and (2) ensuring that the program is optional. Interviews with participants revealed that the time required to be fully prepared for council duties is colossal. So, any consideration that can be made to accommodate the councilors' schedules or to deliver the program in the most efficient way possible would be optimal for ensuring full participation. All the participants expressed a desire to have

a program that would be optional, rather than mandatory. Since the political will to require training is absent, the best path forward is to develop a program that supports the new councilors, based on the findings in Chapter Four. Developing a program that is a true partnership between executive staff and the council, which is in-part implemented by executive staff, but also infuses accountability through oversight by a council committee, has the best chance for success. The findings show that there is a desire for additional support, increased communication, and clear policies that help enhance the council's effectiveness. Mandating an onboarding program, in direct opposition to the desires of the council, would take them further away from experimenting with what an ideal program might look like. The one exception is FOAA training, which is required by the state and must remain a required part of councilor onboarding.

In an ideal world, Eastwood and other municipalities would lead by example and develop onboarding programs that produce measurable, positive outcomes. The success of such programs would identify these communities as leaders in local government such that they would become a model for other local governments who want to decrease the time to proficiency and increase the effectiveness of their councils. Providing onboarding training for new councilors would be a must-do for all local governments because the case has been made that it results in positive outcomes for communities. Adoption rather than enforcement is the ideal.

Recommended Onboarding Modules. Throughout the course of interviewing participants, I identified elements that should be included in the council's onboarding program including: the city and school budget; communication; roles, responsibilities and power; organizational culture and feedback, and mentorship and relationship-building.

Eastwood's executive staff provides the new councilors with an orientation packet, which includes helpful information about city departments, budgets, the city charter, council rules, and other general information. In addition to creating the following modules as part of a comprehensive onboarding program, there is also an opportunity to add these additional elements to the council's orientation packet. Something as simple as a list of "important considerations for being an effective councilor" could go a long way to ensuring that newcomers are thinking about their new roles and finding ways to integrate the onboarding best-practices elements into their own onboarding experience.

City Budget and School Budget. In the City of Eastwood, the school budget is nearly fifty percent of the city's total budget. The city budget itself is multi-faceted and, for councilors, in the words of former Councilor Ancher "a critical competency" (January 31, 2019, p. 11). Councilor Reddy, noting the size and importance of the school budget and how it interplays with the city budget, said that it is "a particular area where we should have more orientation" (November 9, 2018, p. 20). Six of the eight participants specifically cited understanding the finances of the city as an area of major importance; therefore the city and school budgets should be prioritized as an area of focus during the councilors' onboarding. An overview of the budget should be provided during orientation, but due to the complex nature of the municipal budget, the topic should also be revisited and delivered in a way that allows for a full and deep understanding of how policy informs the budget and vice versa.

Communication. Communication spans a broad scope. From internal communications between councilors and staff to external communication between councilors and their constituents, there is a lot to know and to navigate. Former

Councilor Ancher suggested that the city's communication staff be integrated into the onboarding process and emphasized that mastering communication is 'critical' to being effective (November 29, 2018, p. 17).

Questions arise daily that pertain to communication channels. Who can the councilors go to when they have a question about the council packet? Who should they ask about snow removal or sidewalk repairs, so that they can have an accurate and informed response for their constituents? Six of the eight councilors cited constituent communication and constituent relations as being of major importance. There is an opportunity, therefore, to develop programming and education that is infused in the onboarding process and focuses on managing constituent communications. The city's marketing and public relations staff, corporation counsel, and other professionals who are well versed in FOAA compliance could be involved in this training.

Navigating the nuances of email and social media with respect to both positive public relations and compliance with Freedom of Access Laws is essential in the councilors' public-facing roles. How should they respond to requests from media? What about comments on social media? Incorporating communications training into onboarding would be an opportunity to prepare newly elected city councilors for the onslaught of information that they will expect from day one and beyond.

Roles, Responsibilities, and Power. Understanding roles, responsibilities, and power is a complicated, but essential part of onboarding. All eight council participants pointed to the need to clarify the role of the council within the bounds of policymaking, management, and the operations of the city. Some participants had a clear grasp of the delineation of authority, while others did not. Anderson (2017) submits that "the

complexities of stakeholder relationships are high for any executive, but navigating the informal structures and politics at leadership levels in the public sector requires exceptional savvy” (2017, p. 2). One of the challenges faced by the Eastwood Council currently is that “there’s no real bright line between elected officials and policy-making and day-to-day affairs for management” (Councilor Galani, December 21, 2018, p. 5).

When roles are unclear, boundaries are often undefined, and that can lead to confusion and political missteps. Changes in leadership can often shift the balance of power and the interpretation of roles and responsibility can vary by individual. Having clear policies that define and assign roles, responsibilities and power of the Eastwood Council and executive staff would be of benefit.

Understanding Organizational Culture and Creating Feedback Loops. In Harvard Business Review, Byford, et al. (2017) found that the number one stumbling block for new leaders was “lack of understanding of norms and practices” (p. 2). When asked what would increase an individual's success or ‘fit’ within the organization, respondents to the survey “emphasized constructive feedback and help with navigating internal networks and gaining insight into organizational and team dynamics” (p. 2). Closely related to roles, responsibilities, and power, understanding the organizational culture and having established feedback loops are two essential best-practices as illustrated in my Conceptual Framework.

While the City’s Charter and Council Rules were identified as important documents for understanding the culture of the Eastwood Council, most of the participants noted that cultural norms are, in large part, unwritten norms. With all the councilors citing understanding the culture as essential to being effective, there is an

opportunity to describe the culture in a way that can be easily understood. Included in this definition is how feedback is given and received, from council to staff, and vice versa. Thoughtful and well-planned feedback can provide opportunities for growth and expanded understanding.

Mentorship and Relationship-building. Culture, relationships, feedback, and mentoring are intertwined into the invisible structure that ensures success for those who are learning their role within an organization. Bauer and Erdogan (2011) point to the importance of both mentoring and relationship building. They found that mentoring increases knowledge, provides an opportunity for inquiry and feedback, and helps with socialization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). While the majority of the case-study participants supported the idea of mentorship, there was a hesitancy to assign a mentor. Currently, mentor relationships are either sought out by the individual, or occur organically.

Developing a mentoring program within the structure of onboarding would be welcome and beneficial, but, in order to satisfy divergent views on how to implement it, the details, such as seating arrangements and relationship-building, need to be fine-tuned. For example, seating arrangements should be carefully considered when the council welcomes new members. Councilor Strong made this point during our second interview: “So helpful to have someone else in the same place as you, so that you can lean over during a meeting and say “What did we just do? What are we doing?” (laughs) and then also lean over to the other side to someone who is more experienced and say “Does this mean..?” (January 31, 2019, p. 7).

Bauer and Erdogan (2011) also highlight the importance of individuals “facilitating their own socialization by actively building relationships” (p. 54). While

onboarding can assist with many aspects of a LEOs integration, other aspects will need to be self-driven and self-motivated. Participants echoed this sentiment in their interviews, pointing to relationship-building as an integral part of what they do, even before they are elected onto the council. My revised Conceptual Framework shows relationship-building as a self-directed aspect of onboarding. In our first interview, Councilor Reddy summarized this point beautifully: “I think being effective is all about building relationships” (November 9, 2018, p. 17). On the Eastwood Council, relationships are forged over coffee.

Prioritizing Professional Development. Professional development was cited repeatedly as one of the most useful mechanisms for new councilors to better understand the nuances of their new role. Opportunities offered by the National League of Cities (NLC) allow councilors to network with peers all over the country. Locally, the state’s Municipal Association and Council of Governments, though viewed as less of a resource than NLC, also offer courses to help expand locally elected officials’ knowledge of essential aspects of the job. All the participants pointed to the benefits of professional development, as did the City Manager, though the City Manager and some of the participants also agreed that a better job could be done to ensure that councilors are able to take advantage of available opportunities. The challenge for executive staff, who will be delivering essential components of the onboarding, will be for the details to be communicated clearly during the onboarding process and prioritized for the entirety of the councilors’ tenure with the Eastwood Council. Of particular help would be making it clear what funds are available and how to access those funds for professional development opportunities and the process by which councilors register for and plan

travel to such events. Slack (1990) notes that continual training and education offers a wide variety of benefits and “can increase the level of productivity and thereby enhance [local government]’s responsiveness to the needs and demands of the citizenry” (p. 397).

The importance of designing and implementing a customized onboarding program for the Eastwood Council cannot be understated. In addition to the previously stated benefits which include reduced time to proficiency and increased effectiveness, when onboarding is done correctly, it can also increase organizational commitment, lead to higher performance levels, and reduced stress (Bauer, 2010). For LEOs, who face time-constraints and pressure and are relied upon for the community’s most important decisions, these outcomes would be welcomed by both the individuals receiving the onboarding as well as the community that benefits from the council’s measured and thoughtful decision-making.

Recommendation Two: Continue to Invest in and Improve Technology that Supports the Council and Improves both Communication and Efficiency

Continued investments in technology to support the council bode well for enhancing communication and increasing efficiency. Upgrades will surely be a welcomed addition, as improvements made under the leadership of Manager Isaac have been viewed favorably by the participants. Councilor Fortier recognized what a world of difference it made in his ability to respond to constituents. In our first interview, Councilor Fortier said that the recent migration to Google for Government “fundamentally changed” how the council communicates with constituents, adding that it made him more “efficient” and “responsive”, and that the upgrades in technology have

just been “totally transformative” (December 17, 2017, p. 15). Councilor Strong also agreed that the technology is “moving in the right direction” (November 29, 2018, p. 9).

In 2017, the City of Redmond, Washington went through a thorough evaluation of their city’s onboarding processes. In addition to clarifying roles and responsibilities and customizing educational modules, the city also incorporated informational videos and interactive web-based applications into their onboarding program (City of Redmond, 2017). L’Oréal has responded to emerging communications trends by creating a customized app that new hires interact with throughout their onboarding process and beyond (Bauer, 2010). The use of technology in supporting individuals throughout onboarding is seen as imperative for successful outcomes (Filipkowski, 2017; Filipkowski, Heinsch, & Wiete, 2017; Lahey, 2014; O.C. Tanner, 2008).

Availability of time and resources are recognized as the two biggest hurdles for implementing the recommendations above. Elected bodies that offer training, induction, or onboarding programs consistently note both time and cost as major constraints (Coghill, et al, 2009; Greenwood & Wilson, 1990; Jonga & Munzwa, 2009).

Recommendation Three: Engage in Cross-organizational Collaboration for the Development of a Training Program for LEOs

Throughout the United States, there are examples of training programs for locally elected officials that represent a cross-collaboration between municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and universities. The City of Eastwood has a unique opportunity to engage with local nonprofit organizations that are focused on municipal issues, such as the state’s Municipal Association and local and regional Council of Governments. A creative partnership could begin to address the need for training locally elected officials

using a methodical and strategic approach. While professional development opportunities are currently offered by these organizations, there is not a comprehensive program designed with the locally elected in mind.

Another underutilized resource is local universities, which provide ample access to academic leaders and experts in the fields of public policy, communications, and leadership. Local universities could assist with curriculum development and delivery. As Battaglio (2008) notes “academic institutions can play an important role in advancing the goal of responsible government” (p. 125). Jonga and Munzwa (2009) state that “the employing authority bears the responsibility for organizing the induction training although it can, sometimes, be appropriate to use the facilities provided by other local authorities, colleges, universities, as well as private professional training institutions” (p. 6). A prime example of a successful partnership is that between the School of Government at UNC Chapel Hill and the North Carolina League of Municipalities. Together, they regularly offer courses such as ‘Essentials of Municipal Government’, ‘Strategic Planning in Government’, and ‘Public Records and IT Procurement’ (University of North Carolina School of Government, n.d.).

The State of Maine has an example of a training program that is broad and deep. On its website, the Institute for Civic Leadership (ICL) positions itself as “an experiential, eight month, inward journey during which leaders hone their understanding of themselves, their teams, their organizations and communities while developing and practicing the necessary skills to lead effectively in today’s fast-paced environment” (Maine Development Foundation, n.d.). I should note that this training is not mandatory and welcomes not only locally elected officials, but anyone who identifies as a civic

leader in their community. The ICL is an example of a well-designed program that integrates multi-sector partnerships for positive outcomes for its participants.

In highlighting models from around the United States, I am suggesting that city councils can create their own model by leveraging existing trainings to form a comprehensive program for locally elected officials. Furthermore, this recommendation is intended to benefit not just the councilors of Eastwood, but locally elected officials throughout the region and state who would benefit from a training and education program to support their entrance into public sector service. Whether or not individual municipalities have their own customized onboarding programs, a regional program could serve to supplement locally elected officials' orientation or onboarding that they receive in the towns and cities in which they serve.

The research literature, combined with case study findings, reveal ways in which the City of Eastwood can support its newly elected councilors through a customized onboarding program. By integrating technology and focusing on professional development, the city can ensure that councilors are well-equipped for the demands of their job. Focusing on the unique needs identified by the councilors, executive staff can craft a program that begins soon after election and continues throughout the councilors' first year. Additionally, there are further opportunities to bring together other local organizations and educational institutions to develop a broader program that might support locally elected officials from around the region and state.

The City of Eastwood is doing many things right. Orientation of new councilors is viewed favorably and the council itself is actively engaged in seeking ways to expand their knowledge and networks through professional development. The Eastwood Council

recognizes the importance of relationship-building, communication, and feedback, and is open to ways to build upon that and to create increased efficiencies through the use of technology. One of the greatest indicators that Eastwood is poised for success is the willingness to engage in a process of discovery through this case-study and to be honest, open, and transparent.

Recommendations for Future Research

Quantitative Study with a Large n

Using the resources of the National League of Cities to deliver a survey to its membership could yield a great many insights. A quantitative analysis with a large n would be beneficial to better understand the experience of locally elected officials nationwide.

Multi-case or Cross-case Analysis

A cross-case or multi-case analysis to compare and contrast the experiences of other councils with that of Eastwood would provide useful insights. Using the same framework developed in the literature review and further refined through participant interviews, a rich description might emerge that would enable further analysis of locally elected councilors' experience with onboarding in a variety of settings.

Program Evaluation of Onboarding Programs for Local Councils

Designing a program evaluation for existing onboarding programs would be useful to determine the effectiveness of such programs. Pre- and post-tests would be created and criteria for success would be defined.

Mixed-methods Study

A mixed-methods study that focuses on the correlation between city councilors who have prior elected experience, either on local school boards or in other elected roles, and their level of preparedness and effectiveness in their new role as a councilor.

Onboarding is an effective method for ensuring that newcomers are provided the tools and resources they need to succeed. Many newly elected officials come to their roles without prior experience in the public sector. Much is at stake in municipalities where resources are stretched and demands are plentiful. Vogelsang-Coombs and Miller (1999) submit that “the job of local elected officials in governing municipalities is a complicated and demanding one; how LEOs handle their jobs affects taxpayers and their communities’ present and future generations” (p. 199). Providing an onboarding program that is customized to the needs of locally elected officials not only bodes well for the success of the individual, but for the success of the organization, and the community as a whole.

What the case study of the City of Eastwood Council revealed is an engaged group of individuals who are being provided with an orientation, opportunities for professional development, and investments in technology to support their endeavors. The councilors themselves have taken the initiative to form relationships, to network, and to find the information they need to do their jobs well. The councilors are stretched thin with the demand of full-time work, families, and the additional responsibilities and expectations that come with being a city councilor in a growing and thriving city. Even with the demands, councilors like Lucas Fortier, want very much to succeed: “I had an idea of how I wanted things to go. I wanted to treat it not just as a job. I wanted people to

feel that, no matter what, they saw me as someone who took the job seriously”

(December 17, 2018, p. 3).

The design and implementation of a customized onboarding program, with involvement from executive staff and council is the logical next step to ensure that new council members are given the best chance to succeed. With a positive working relationship between council and executive staff and a City Manager ready and willing to do whatever it takes to support the council, the time is right, right now, to begin.

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Appendix A: Case Study Participant Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview One

Brief personal history/biography

- **Please describe how you decided to run for city council.**

Sub questions:

- What drew you to public service as an elected official?
- Did you seek out information at city hall about what was required to be a councilor?
- Was that information readily available? If not, would it have been helpful? What was your understanding of the responsibilities of the position?

Preparedness for the role

- **Before being elected on to city council, would you say that you had a good understanding of what would be required of you as a Councilor?**

Sub questions:

- Did you have any former training or education in the following subjects: public policy, economics, budgets, public process?
- Tell me about the process by which you evolved as city councilor.

Pre-boarding

- **Was any pre-boarding provided? Pre-boarding would be any training that you would have received between being elected and being sworn in.**
- **Describe as best you can the time between Election Day and your first council meeting with regard to onboarding processes that you experienced.**

This would involve any communications directly from the City with regard to your new role as a City Councilor.

Sub questions:

- What steps were taken between being elected and before the council meeting to ensure that you were prepared?
- What personal steps did you take?
- What steps did the City take?
- Which city staff was involved in the onboarding process?
- What other 3rd party organizations were involved in helping you to prepare for your role as city councilor?

Orientation

- **What did you receive for orientation/training? Please describe that process in as thorough of a manner as you can.**

Sub questions:

- Were you provided with an historical overview of the Portland City Council? Is that something that would be important/valuable to you as a Councilor?
- What information was provided to you by the City that helped you to better understand your role and responsibilities as a city councilor?
- How do you recall feeling in your first few council meetings?
- Are there tools you wish you had been given?
- Did you understand Robert's Rules of Order before you were elected?
- How long after your first council meeting would you say that you were confident about the council rules?

- Was information provided via paper, digital format, online portal, etc?

Culture

- **Was it clear to you what the organizational values were of the council?**
- **Describe any of the ways in which you knew “how things worked” and how you came to receive that information.**

Sub questions:

- Were there any norms presented to you?

Mentorship

- **Was a mentor provided to you as a newly elected councilor?**
- **Did you seek a mentor on your own?**

Sub questions:

- Do you believe there should be a formal mentorship program for newly elected councilors?

Professional development

- **What professional development opportunities are provided to you as a city councilor?**

Sub questions:

- Do you take advantage of those offerings?

Feedback

- **Is there a process for you to provide feedback on what you think is going well or what could be improved?**

Sub questions:

- Did you ever provide any feedback about how your onboarding could have been improved?
- Are there any processes in place for receiving feedback about your performance as a Councilor?

Second tier-questions: (To extend interview #1 or inform interview #2)

Mistakes

- What has been your experience with mistakes being made by the council?
- Do you think that there are any onboarding practices that could have prevented those mistakes?

Professionalization

- What does professionalization mean to you?
- Do you think that it is important that the Council is professionalized?

Constituent feedback

- What was your understanding of how you might receive constituent feedback and how to respond?

Proper channels of inquiry

- Was it clear to you who you should go to with questions?
- How did you come to understand what was acceptable - what was the process for communication, direction, requesting information, etc?

Collaboration and Team Building

- How important do you think team-building is as part of a councils' onboarding process?
- Do you believe that there is collaboration among councilors?

- Do you think that is important?
- Should there be a process built into onboarding to help develop the skills related to collaboration and problem solving?

Data/information

- What is your understanding of where critically important data is housed, should you need quick and reliable access to information?
- What technology/IT platforms are used to get/give/share information and to log or track communications?
- What methods are the most helpful to get information?

Third party resources

- Is the State Municipal Association a helpful resource? What other outside resources have been helpful?
- Do you view local colleges and universities as a helpful resource for educating and training local officials?

Suggestions for improvement of the City's onboarding process

- **Is there a need for an onboarding program for newly elected councilors?**
- **What recommendations do you have for improving onboarding for newly elected officials?**

Appendix B: Pilot Study

Pilot Study: Process and Reflection

On April 20, 2018 I interviewed Tom Smith from a small town council in the northeastern United States. The interview was conducted at Mr. Smith's law office. I arrived at approximately 12:15 p.m. and began the interview, which was semi-structured with open-ended questions. I employed the coding methodology below to code the interview.

Onboarding Element	Code
Pre-boarding	Pre
Orientation	Orient
Culture	Cul
Introductions	Intro
Mentor	Ment
Technology	Tech
Feedback	Feed
Professional Development	ProfDev

An absence of almost all elements of best-practices onboarding was discovered as a result of the coding and analysis. Following is a summary of the data, based on the codes listed above.

Onboarding Element	Absent	Present	Partial	Notes
Pre-boarding			✓	<p>“None. Zero.”</p> <p>“Weirder than that, I showed up to what I thought was a swearing in ceremony, not realizing that at the end of the swearing in ceremony, I would sit down at the dais as a councilor and conduct a meeting.”</p> <p>“We were invited to come watch meetings.”</p>
Orientation			✓	<p>“No.”</p> <p>“Even having a training video - an hour-long training video would be fantastically useful.”</p> <p>“We were given an introduction and orientation on FOIA.”</p> <p>“I think a binder of expectations and mores, practices, tradition, would be very helpful.”</p> <p>“even just having some basic framework would be helpful.”</p>
Culture	✓			<p>“I didn’t understand the agenda-setting process. I didn’t understand the public hearing process. I didn’t understand the process by which resolutions were adopted.”</p> <p>“But beyond that, the etiquette of when and where you call yourself councilor, when and how you present yourself as councilor, when you’re acting in your capacity as a councilor versus just your individual capacity - none of that was clear and it caused great problems later on in the term.”</p> <p>“Culture and cultural expectations, I think is terribly important.”</p> <p>“The best part of the onboarding process is to watch and see how it is done. Both to get a sense of the cultural mores and patterns, but</p>

				to see if there is something that you want to change.” “Culture matters a lot. A Lot.”
Introductions	✓			
Mentor	✓			“No.” “I sought out a prior town councilor who gave me guidance.”
Feedback	✓			“There is no process.”
Professional Development	✓			“I’m unaware of any such line item. I don’t think we have one.”

Using a second tier of coding, In Vivo, I identified the following data points of interest, that I would follow-up on in interview 2 and member-check, if it were part of the full research scope:

Need for Representation on Town Council: “and then realized soon thereafter that having good people on the town council, not just on the school committee, but on the town council was critical because that was the gateway for the budget.”

Professionalization of Council: “I think we could stand to be professionalized and have a little more training and direction.”

“Professionalism is the word I keep coming back to.”

Mistakes: “But beyond that, the etiquette of when and where you call yourself councilor, when and how you present yourself as councilor, when you’re acting in your capacity as a councilor versus just your individual capacity - none of that was clear and it caused great problems later on in the term.”

“And it wasn’t 100% clear whether this person was acting, to the extent to which this person was acting in her capacity as a town councilor because it wasn’t clear what role the town could have at all. You know, if Town Councilor [Tom Smith] goes to visit the NASA facility, um, it’s unclear what influence or jurisdiction the town has over it. This was a landlord, so there are things the town council could do, as it turns out. But, there weren’t a lot of statues on the book and it wasn’t 100% clear whether this was a local issue or a state issue.”

Team-Building: “In fact, of all the things we’ve done wrong, I think failing to have that sort of team-building, um, interpersonal, humanizing, engagement is probably the most important failing.”

Collaboration and Problem-Solving: “And collaboration and problem-solving, those are good things.”

Third-Party Onboarding Resources: “I was barely aware of [state] Municipal Association. Today, I am barely aware of [state] Municipal Association.”

Time to Proficiency: “Yes, the time to proficiency is too long.”

Appendix C

Interview One Summary Sample | Councilor Strong

Participant 4: Individual experience with onboarding program in case-study council

Pre-Boarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received a call from the City Manager on Election night to congratulate you, inform you that there would be an orientation, and that your District meeting was the very next evening. Your fellow colleagues/councilors reached out to invite you to coffee.
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your orientation included another fellow Councilor who was elected on at the same time as you – Councilor Fortier. The Manager’s office organized the orientation. At the orientation you received a binder, which included the Charter, the Rules, and information about various City departments. You attended a workshop in a nearby municipality focused on FOAA training and Sunshine Laws. Other fellow Councilors (Galani, Ancher) and the Mayor were in attendance. You attended a Rules Committee meeting, as a council-elect, to go over the Council rules because the Mayor was proposing some changes. You believe that attending was <u>very</u> helpful.
Introductions to key people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introductions were made to various Department Heads both on inauguration day and at many meetings during pre-boarding and orientation.
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City Manager is your main point of contact for requesting information and feedback, but you can also go to Corporation Counsel and the City Clerk. You find that having one point of contact for information is helpful and efficient. You get plenty of unsolicited feedback from constituents and the general public. You feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback with your Council colleagues.
Understand the culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You view the coffee meetings with councilors as part of your ‘informal’ onboarding and it allowed you to build relationships, which you understand to be a part of the council culture. You believe that the Council Rules begin to define, or play a part in defining the culture of the Council. You believe that the senior members of council have a big role in establishing the Council’s culture.

<p>Professional Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You were aware of the state’s Municipal Association, but you recall receiving more informational materials from them upon your reelection. • It was not communicated directly to you about how you might, as a Councilor, access and use funds in the City’s budget for professional development. It is something that you discovered on your own talking to other fellow Councilors. • You think it would be helpful to have it clearly outlined how much is available - either in total or for each Councilor to use in each budget year towards professional development. • The annual National League of Cities conference is excellent for professional development and allows you to connect with your State and Federal legislators/representatives, as well as your fellow Eastwood colleagues and other colleagues across the country to share best-practices. • You believe that attending conferences and learning from others makes you a better leader. • Time is probably the biggest roadblock to pursuing more professional development opportunities.
<p>Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the orientation materials were presented in hard-copy form to you, but that information also exists on the City website. It would be helpful to move all of those important documents, such as the Charter, Rules, and Code, to a Team Drive or Civic Clerk for easier access. • The new Civic Clerk software has the potential to increase access and organization of information that is important for Councilors. • Moving to the Google platform has been ‘tremendous’, since the previous email software for Councilors was ‘horrible’. • For the average person, the City website is not easy to navigate to find information because of the quantity of information on the site.
<p>Mentor/Buddy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mentor was not assigned to you as part of the onboarding process, but you view your Council colleagues as mentors and go to them for different reasons, based on their area of expertise, knowledge or experience. • You think it could be potentially helpful to offer a ‘mentor/buddy’ to newly elected councilors. The mentor would be a more senior member of Council who would reach out to go over the Rules and answer basic questions who would also then reach out from time to time over the first year to check back in.

Is there anything that you would like to add or change, based on the interview #1 re-cap?

Questions for interview #2:

- Do you think there's room to improve the current onboarding process for newly elected councilors?
- Ideally, what would that look like?
- Given the onboarding best-practices diagram, where might you put the most emphasis in a revamped onboarding program for the Eastwood City Council? The least?
- Should the Council itself be more involved in new councilor's onboarding?
- What is the best mechanism for creating that process? (ie. Rules & Reports Committee?)
- What are the public policy implications if locally elected officials do not receive best-practices onboarding?
- How critical is the window of opportunity between Election Day and swearing-in for providing information and onboarding to new councilors?
- How important is the **relationship-building process** in becoming a more effective member of Council?
- What is the one piece of advice that you would give to future newly elected members of the Eastwood City Council?