



## PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

IMPARTIAL RESEARCH. INFORMED DEBATE.

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### For immediate release

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## Public Policy Forum announces 25th annual “Salute to Local Government” award winners

**MILWAUKEE**, Wisconsin – *Wednesday, May 31, 2017* – The Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, a nonpartisan public policy research organization, has announced its 2017 *Salute to Local Government* award winners.

“Despite ideological differences and distinct views on the appropriate size and scope of government, we hope that all citizens would agree on the importance of celebrating outstanding performance in our local governments and school districts,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “The Salute reflects the Forum’s strong belief that qualities like innovation and collaboration are alive and well in municipal buildings, courthouses, and school administration offices across southeast Wisconsin, and that governmental bodies and individuals exhibiting those qualities should be recognized and applauded.”

This year’s *Salute* includes awards categories that recognize governments and school districts for innovative problem-solving, effective use of technology, partnership, and cooperation, as well as individuals in the public sector for excellence and lifetime achievement.

The awards will be presented at the Public Policy Forum's 25th annual *Salute to Local Government* breakfast on **Tuesday, June 20, 7:30 – 9:00 a.m. at the Pfister Hotel in Downtown Milwaukee**. The special 25th anniversary program will include a tribute to former Forum President Jean Tyler – who presided over the event's creation and passed away late last year – and a keynote address by Mike Gousha, Distinguished Fellow in Law and Public Policy at Marquette University Law School.

The 2017 recipients are:

### **“Innovative Approach to Problem Solving”**

*City of Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services*

Hundreds of low-income Milwaukee homeowners struggle each year to address code violations; under the City of Milwaukee's Compliance Loan Program (CLP), they are connected to resources that can help them do so. Administered by the City's Department of Neighborhood Services (DNS), this program provides homeowners with interest-free, deferred payment loans to cover the cost of repairs needed to abate building code violations. It uniquely uses inspector referrals, which allows DNS to take an active role not only in issuing orders to correct building code violations, but also in directly working with Milwaukee's most vulnerable citizens to make needed repairs. In 2016, more than 70% of recipients were 50 years of age or older and the median household income was \$18,280. Additionally, 70% of these individuals were on a fixed income, with more than 70% owning their home for more than a decade. Since the CLP began in 2014, none of the recipients has lost their home to foreclosure or been cited for additional building code violations.

### **“Innovative Use of Data or Technology”**

*Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture*

Seeking to better understand usage of its world class 125-mile Oak Leaf Trail and what could be done to improve functionality, Milwaukee County's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture (DPRC) turned to technology to provide data-driven guidance. The Automated Trail Counter Program utilizes eight counters in various locations throughout the County's trail system, which employ infrared sensors to detect the change in temperature as users pass by. Electromagnetic sensors allow for differentiation between pedestrians and cyclists and track the direction in which the user is traveling. The counters also define the point in time when the user passed by, allowing DPRC to compare user rates and trends in real time, and giving it the ability to define which sections are used primarily for commuting to work and which for recreation. This information is used to efficiently allocate resources, improve maintenance schedules, and plan special events.

## **“Intergovernmental Cooperation”**

*Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department*

Having already collaborated successfully on numerous joint initiatives, including emergency preparedness, Wisconsin Well Woman program, and WIC programs, Ozaukee and Washington counties decided to take the next step in 2015 by formally merging their public health departments. The result is a streamlined department that saved taxpayers approximately \$300,000 in the first year through staffing efficiencies and reduced administrative overhead, and that has generated enhanced programming and new initiatives. In addition, the Washington Ozaukee Public Health Department is now serving as a model of successful consolidation to other local governments, with its example generating an effort to change State law to allow for greater flexibility in determining cost sharing for joint public health departments. The consolidated department also recently received a \$75,000 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to measure its public health outcomes and potentially allow it to serve as a national model.

## **“Public-Private Cooperation”**

*City of West Allis and Whole Health Clinical Group*

Whole Health Clinical Group – the largest provider of mental health services in southeast Wisconsin – was seeking to build a new facility to realize its vision of providing a modern and accessible clinic that could serve both the behavioral and physical health needs of its 800 clients. Whole Health and its developer – Cardinal Capital Management – identified the former Roosevelt Elementary School, a West Allis-West Milwaukee School District facility that had been vacant since the 1990s, as an ideal potential location. Securing the necessary approvals was a significant challenge that required substantial partnership with the City of West Allis. Working in close cooperation, Whole Health Clinical Group, Cardinal Capital, and the City’s economic development staff successfully engaged the public, addressed neighborhood concerns, and secured rezoning approvals from the City’s Plan Commission and Common Council. Groundbreaking occurred in September 2016 and the facility is scheduled to open in June.

## **“Jean B. Tyler Leader of the Future Award”**

*Julia Robson*

*Asst. Natural Areas Coordinator, Milw, Co. Dept. of Parks, Recreation, and Culture*

Julia Robson launched her career with the Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture as a college intern in 2011 and was hired as a Wildlife Technician soon after her graduation from UWM. In 2012, she became the Department’s Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator. Among her accomplishments are creation of the Department’s first Citizen Science Program, which has involved more than 200 citizen participants in the collection of natural resource data within the Parks system’s natural areas, and which won the State of Wisconsin’s 2016 “Citizen Science Program of the Year.” She also led the Department’s efforts to develop a Coyote Management Plan. According to her boss, Brian Russart, “it is incredibly rare for someone so young to have such a major impact on a Parks Department and the larger community that it serves.”

### **“James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award”**

*Thomas W. Meaux (co-winner)*

Retired Administrator, Ozaukee County

Tom Meaux retired in January after a 35-year career in public service, including the past 17 years as Ozaukee County Administrator. Tom also served as Milwaukee County Treasurer, on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, and in the Wisconsin Assembly. Known for his nonpartisanship, Tom was elected to the Assembly as a Democrat but was hired by Ozaukee County – one of the state's most Republican counties – as its first administrative coordinator in 1999. He presided over several important changes to Ozaukee County government, including reductions to the size of the County Board and its number of committees; improvement and expansion of the County Fairgrounds; and renovation of the County's nursing home facility as part of the larger Lasata Senior Living Campus. Ozaukee County Board Chairman Lee Schlenvogt refers to Tom as "Ozaukee County's humble hero" and says "his impact was tremendous and will shape our future for decades to come."

### **“James R. Ryan Lifetime Achievement Award”**

*Chris Swartz (co-winner)*

Retired Manager, Village of Shorewood

After a 35-year career in local government, Chris Swartz retired from his position as Manager of the Village of Shorewood in early May. His 13-year tenure in Shorewood was preceded by 13 years as the Village Administrator in Sussex. He also worked for the Village of East Troy and for the Public Policy Forum when it was known as the Citizens' Governmental Research Bureau. In Shorewood, Chris spearheaded creation of a comprehensive financial planning framework for the Village and helped implement several far-reaching economic development initiatives. He also coordinated the Village's response to severe flooding problems that emerged in 2010. Outside of his official duties, he taught Public Administration at UWM and led the creation of an alumni chapter for the program. Shorewood Village President Guy Johnson says "Chris has been a great leader and guide in Shorewood for the past 13 years. It's not a cliché to say that he leaves us in a better state than when he arrived."

### **"Norman N. Gill Award"**

*Norm Cummings*

Director of Administration, Waukesha County

Norm Cummings was appointed as the first Director of the newly created Waukesha County Department of Administration in 1995. In that role, he serves as the Chief Financial Officer for the County and oversees Finance, Human Resources, Information Systems, Risk Management, and Purchasing. He has brought an impressive level of professional administration to the County, establishing its internal audit function, risk management program, centralized delinquent collections, comprehensive investment policies, and performance-based budgeting. Norm currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Wisconsin Municipal Mutual Insurance Company, which he helped establish, and is Vice Board Chair for the State of Wisconsin Investment Board. Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow says Norm is an "innovator and leader" and calls him "without a doubt one of the most respected professionals in the field of government finance and administration."

The *Salute* is sponsored by Baker Tilly; BMO Harris Bank; Ehlers & Associates, Inc.; Bader Philanthropies; GRAEF; Milwaukee Public Television; Northwestern Mutual Foundation; Potawatomi Bingo Casino; Quarles & Brady, LLP; Veolia Water; and We Energies.

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum ([www.publicpolicyforum.org](http://www.publicpolicyforum.org)) – which was established in 1913 as a local government watchdog – is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of regional public policy issues.