

Justin: Welcome back to another episode of Bush School Uncorked. We are back in Historic Downtown Bryan, at our usual spot, Downtown Uncorked, doing a live recording. We have an excellent panel with us. And first, Greg's back.

Greg: Yes, I have returned.

Justin: Yeah, he was off doing administrator duties last time, I think.

Greg: I was indeed.

Justin: All right, well, thanks for coming back.

Greg: It's a pleasure to be back.

Justin: All right. The topic for tonight is local governments, and local governments as engines of innovation, engines of innovation for governance. And we have an excellent panel to inform us on this. And I'm going to go around I'm going to start with Rob Greer to the left and Rob Greer-

Greg: Why do you say to the left? No one on the podcast knows where anyone is sitting.

Justin: It's going to be a long night.

Rob Greer: I'm Rob Greer, and I'm to the left. Assistant professor in the Bush School. I study state and local governments, specifically financial managements, debt management, municipal securities, and lately water policy and infrastructure financing.

Justin: Thank you, sir. Thanks for being here.

Rob Greer: Yeah, yeah.

Justin: Hugh.

Hugh Walker: Hugh Walker, I'm the deputy city manager in Bryan. Been there a little over 24, yeah, about 24 and a half years and having had an opportunity to watch a lot of things change in the city.

Justin: Yeah, I bet so. Yeah, I'm really excited to hear of some examples of things y'all worked on in the city throughout that process, because when I arrived in 2014 that was one of the big talks around the department and campus was the transformation Bryan had gone through over the past few years. I'm excited to hear what some of that process was like. And thanks for being here.

Hugh Walker: My pleasure, thank you for the opportunity.

Justin: Anne.

Ann Bowman: I'm Anne Bowman. I'm in the Bush School, as well. I'm a professor. I teach state and local government courses, some environmental courses, as well. And do a lot of research on those subjects, also. And I am, too, am glad to be here.

Justin: Oh, well, thanks for being here. This will, the audience may remember, be the second time we've had Professors Greer and Bowman here, and second time together. You were on the same panel last time.

Ann Bowman: I believe that was one of the top rated podcasts, wasn't it?

Justin: It was definitely one of the top rated.

Ann Bowman: In terms of five stars.

Justin: I gave it five stars, personally. Greg I think, maybe four.

Greg: It came in after the hot takes, I think.

Ann Bowman: True, but-

Justin: Okay, I'd like to talk about local governments and one thing we talked about before we got rolling was placing local governments in their general context of what they do and how they operate and why they have the flexibility, or the opportunity, to even be innovative. Who would like to take that first?

Ann Bowman: I'm happy to.

Justin: All right.

Ann Bowman: There are two or three things I want to say, depending on how we count. First of all, I would start with, I hate to say it, but local governments are creatures of their states. So as a consequence they have the powers that state governments give them. That is important to keep in mind as we talk about innovation. Some would argue that is a spur to innovation, because if you don't have much discretionary authority, you've got to figure out cool, clever new ways of doing things. So some would argue it's a spur to innovation. But the other thing to remember is that states vary in how much power they give their local governments, right?

Justin: Okay.

Ann Bowman: We're in Texas, probably you all know this, local governments are relatively ... City governments, at least, relatively empowered. Counties, not so much so. But city governments in Texas enjoy home rule power, which is in effect power of

local self government. That doesn't mean the state won't intervene and stop a local government from doing something [crosstalk 00:03:53]-

Greg: I was going to say, I can think of a few examples.

Ann Bowman: You can, you certainly can.

Justin: Some here in Texas even.

Greg: Indeed.

Ann Bowman: Indeed, yes.

Justin: Okay.

Ann Bowman: Well, it depends on what that local government's doing. Whether it raises the ire of state government or not.

Greg: Like banning fracking, for example, within the municipal-

Ann Bowman: Yeah, banning fracking or plastic bags, whatever, single use plastic bags.

Hugh Walker: Or having a regimented purchasing process.

Ann Bowman: That's reaching really far into local government, to regulate that. And that's exactly the case. That it varies by state as to how much they reach into local government and on what issues they do that. And so I'm using the phrase local government, just a reminder that there's several different types. Cities we'll be focusing on, because let's be honest, they're probably the most interesting of the types.

Hugh Walker: I disagree.

Ann Bowman: I know you would. I know. I apologize. We're going to be hearing about special districts.

Greg: Already, Already we're going to have some controversy on the podcast.

Ann Bowman: I have to be strong. Yeah.

Greg: That's good.

Ann Bowman: Yeah, counties we won't be talking about-

Greg: Hot takes. Hot takes on the counties.

Hugh Walker: We will not be talking about counties.

Greg: Oh, we're not? Okay.

Ann Bowman: No, not counties.

Greg: Hot takes on the special districts.

Ann Bowman: School districts is its own special topic area.

Greg: That's right. Now we've actually covered that with-

Ann Bowman: Okay, good.

Greg: With Lori Taylor.

Ann Bowman: Good.

Greg: And talked about the school, and Deborah Kerr, and talked about school funding and all.

Ann Bowman: Excellent. So that's-

Justin: Yeah, so we've got a little bit of the balance of-

Ann Bowman: Yeah, well, that's good.

Greg: Right.

Ann Bowman: So focusing on cities kind of makes sense. I round this out by saying that one of the reasons it's so important to focus on local governments and cities particularly is that they are, I don't know, the heartbeat of American government. It's where things happen. It's local self governance is a cherished principle, if you will. Not always observed, but it's certainly a principle in American government. And at the local level where the policies that are enacted really affect you on a daily basis, where the problems are very immediate, where you could be shopping at HEB and run into your city council member. It's a very close to you, personal government and-

Greg: I try to run into them with my cart when I'm at HEB.

Ann Bowman: Well, it depends on which district you live in sometimes.

Justin: Were you the last person to run into Hugh?

Ann Bowman: Uh oh. That's serious.

Hugh Walker: Still limping.

Ann Bowman: But finally I would say, we'll be talking I'm sure about some of the policies that local governments adopt, but we'll also be talking about some of the innovative administrative procedures and processes they developed and management efforts that they have made over time. So I think we're ready to hear from Rob.

Rob Greer: Well, I-

Greg: And why all of this was wrong.

Rob Greer: Well, I just-

Ann Bowman: Exactly.

Justin: The county hero!

Rob Greer: I wanted to add additional context because the topic was local governments as tools for innovation and you can't really talk about local government innovation without acknowledging that organizational form can itself be an innovation. When the state wants to solve a problem, one of their tools it just to create a new type of local government to solve that problem.

Ann Bowman: That's true.

Rob Greer: I will leave whether that's a successful strategy or not-

Greg: Give us an example.

Rob Greer: We have an issue in Texas with managing our ground water and making sure that we don't run out of ground water. It's a primary source of drinking water in the state. The state of Texas to manage ground water, rather than doing it themselves or telling local governments to do that, they created ground water conservation districts that sit on top of existing local governments following mostly county lines, but not all counties. So there's significant holes in those maps and those districts are empowered with the ability to regulate wells, well spacing, permitting, fees, all sorts of other things. So rather than them solve the problem through existing administrative functions or existing political sub jurisdictions, they created an additional layer. Now we do this with river authorities, we do this with downtown development districts, we do this with utility districts. We do this with, in some states, mosquito abatement, right? There's all sorts of things that we create new-

Greg: Why not a mosquito elimination?

Rob Greer: Well, I don't know. I don't know. I think we'd get in trouble with PETA maybe? I don't know. I don't know who's advocating for mosquitoes.

Greg: Right, right. We just abate them.

Rob Greer: But I'm sure somebody is.

Greg: We just abate them. So is this a good thing?

Rob Greer: Well, that's a harder question to answer. There are a lot of problems with this system. We essentially by design create functional and organizational fragmentation where there wasn't before, which requires all sorts of administrators to have to spend more time collaborating and coordinating their efforts, rather than focusing on a specific problem. But there are advantages to them as well. The geographic scope, for one thing. Additional revenue streams, for another. Getting around some of those state rules that may apply to cities, but not apply to special districts. And so they have some benefits and some costs.

Greg: Isn't one of the issues about special districts more generally and then we can move on from this, this issue of transparency though, right? Because often times they don't have the same reporting requirements that a local government does. Not to mention the citizens may not even be aware of them. Not to mention they don't elect the people that often are running those special districts-

Rob Greer: So I will sort of correct you a little bit. Often times they do have elective boards that govern. Sometimes they're appointed, sometimes they're elected. But-

Greg: But the water boards in Texas are appointed, right?

Rob Greer: Some of them.

Greg: Oh, it differs from board to board?

Rob Greer: There are about eight different types of jurisdictions that are responsible for delivery of drinking water in Texas and some of them do have some appointed positions on those boards. But there are a majority of elected positions. But, yes, transparency is an issue. A lot of times citizen awareness of who is the political jurisdiction responsible for delivering any specific good or service and how many jurisdictions a person might be within at any given time is something that they may not fully understand.

Ann Bowman: The other issue I would mention there is a question whether it drives up the price of governments, or the cost of governments by having these layered governments all in effect fishing out of the same fiscal common pool. That is one more issue to be resolved.

Justin: Excellent. All right, so with a little bit of them... Actually, I have one more question, Anne, before we move on. You mentioned home rule and that, that gave cities maybe more power in general and then we talked about how Texas

still comes in and intervenes in different ways. What's the other choice to home rule and what does that in general give the cities from a power stand point?

Ann Bowman: Well, Home Rule, there are variations on Home Rule. The concept is just in effect local self government. So it can be limited Home Rule, it can be expanded Home Rule, kind of along that range. The antithesis of home rule is something called Dylan's Rule, which basically gives the states all power.

Justin: Who's rule?

Ann Bowman: Dylan. Judge Dylan, the famous, not Matt, but John Dylan from Iowa who in a court case about railroads basically said local governments have no power at all and if there is a dispute over power it should be resolved in favor of states. And so a number of states are, in Alabama it's considered a strong Dylan's Rule state, where they don't empower their localities. That would be the antithesis of the powers very closely held in the state capital.

Ann Bowman: A city in North Carolina, for example, wanted to regulate skateboarding on its streets, on city streets. And they had to get the legislature to enable them to enact something. Enabling, giving them the power to do that. And one might think that regulating skateboarding is something a local government ought to be able to do.

Greg: I don't know, that's a lot of power to give to a city government.

Ann Bowman: That's true. [crosstalk 00:12:00]

Rob Greer: If I remember correctly, in Alabama the municipalities, their budgets have to be approved through the state legislatures. That's right-

Greg: The annual budget goes through the state legislature?

Rob Greer: That's right.

Ann Bowman: Yeah. In some cases it's kind of proforma, but if there's a municipality they want to pick out to do pressure, they certainly can do that.

Greg: In Texas Home Rule how much taxing power does that give to municipalities?

Rob Greer: Less than it used to.

Ann Bowman: Yeah.

Greg: What does that mean?

Ann Bowman: Rely heavily on property and sales, I'm sure we'll get into that. The legislature recently pulled back the power of local governments to increase property taxes.

Greg: Oh.

Ann Bowman: So it's kind of like a taxing limitation in effect. They're getting creative in how they're dealing with that potential limitation.

Greg: Yeah, Hugh?

Hugh Walker: Yes, they are. And it wasn't so much the tax rate, but the tax revenue that they've restricted and so even as a community grows, it will impact, to some degree, the amount of revenue that you're able to bring in or increase because of the cap that they've put on that.

Greg: Could you explain what the cap is?

Hugh Walker: It is now a 4% cap where-

Greg: In terms of total revenue.

Hugh Walker: Yes, for total revenue. Previously it was an 8% cap. Now we've gone down to 4%, which includes, you're right, total revenue. And there's a provision that also addresses new growth. So new growth is carved out of that.

Greg: It's carved out of the 4-

Hugh Walker: It's carved out for that first year, but then the next year, of course, that new growth is no longer new growth and then is completed.

Greg: Okay.

Hugh Walker: A little complicated.

Greg: So that means that if at your existing tax rate you're collecting more than 4% than you did last year with new growth [inaudible 00:13:55] off for a year.

Hugh Walker: Right.

Greg: You have to reduce the tax rate because you're collecting too much revenue?

Hugh Walker: The tax rate could have to be decreased, yes, depending on the amount of revenue growth that you have because of evaluation and other factors-

Greg: Right, right.

Hugh Walker: So, yes.

Greg: Wow. Wow.

Rob Greer: The rule applying to revenue is really important, especially in Texas where we're seeing a lot of growth in certain areas. Certainly in the Bryan/College Station area.

Greg: Certainly in the Brazos Valley.

Rob Greer: In the Brazos Valley, right. And so without the city doing anything just property value is increasing, right? Because of demand.

Greg: Right.

Rob Greer: That bumps up against the cap in some cases.

Hugh Walker: Right.

Rob Greer: And so the new growth being excluded doesn't address, well, if you're just-

Greg: If property value is going up.

Rob Greer: If property value is going up, that's right.

Hugh Walker: Yeah.

Justin: Okay, so one of the things that I wanted to make sure that we get to is some examples of local government being innovative as Anne was mentioning earlier. Local governments really where most of the services that you enjoy on a day-to-day basis are provided. They have to adapt maybe most quickly to changes in the local culture and local environment to continue to provide effective and efficient services to the citizenry. Before we got together I had asked Hugh if he might think of a couple of examples during his time as Deputy City Manager and his time in Bryan that might give us some flavor of innovations that government can do at the local level to provide better services, better quality, new services, different things that the citizens demand. So I was wondering, Hugh, if you might be willing to maybe start us off with some example in particular that you like of something that you've gotten to do that you felt was innovative and improved services and was a benefit for the city.

Hugh Walker: Sure. And it's not something I did, it's something that the community did. I think that's important to identify. And we're sitting in it, that's downtown. I came here in 1995 when downtown was essentially boarded up and if you've been here long enough to know, downtown has gone through quite a transition and it continues to go through that transition. The city actually owns property further north here where there's green space, essentially. But real opportunity for additional growth.

Hugh Walker: And that all came about through dynamic leadership from the City Council. Again, we're talking about policy. They decided they wanted to have downtown

be what it used to be. It used to be this vibrant place where people came and they shopped and they spent time, they went to the movies, and they dined here. This was really the center of the universe for the Brazos Valley, essentially. And that's what back in the mid-'90s, early '90s, that's what the City Council wanted to see again. And I think most people would tell you it didn't happen overnight that downtown disappeared essentially, that it closed up and was boarded up.

Hugh Walker: And so that change wasn't going to occur overnight to reenergize it. But the council was very diligent. In about 2001, they approved a downtown master plan, which has really been the Bible or almost everything that's happened down here. A really dynamic document that focused on retail and commercial and residential and how we could tie all those together. And in particular, also make sure that it's very pedestrian friendly. So it's really some place where people can gather and enjoy. It's a space that people can come as a family and other groups and really focus on that quality of life sort of thing.

Justin: How does that, I know it's a long process, but how do you even get that ball rolling to say... There's a lot of downtowns. I'm from rural Georgia and when I go back home and visit, you just see them everywhere that seem like if they just had some innovative leadership, there's still a large enough population, there's still some resources. But then you go downtown and it never recovered from the early '80s, right?

Hugh Walker: Right.

Justin: So what types of things? How were you able to get creative or innovative or how was the city able to do those things? Is it creative financing structures that were provided by grants or by the state or was it public-private partnerships with some of the local businesses? Was it more a city spearheaded? What were some of the pieces of it that allowed it to get done, I guess?

Hugh Walker: In the end, it ended up being all of those things to some degree. And the city, in my opinion, took the first step because I think from the private side, what they needed to be seeing, what they needed to be assured of was the city was committed to bringing downtown back. And so we began with some infrastructure improvements and that was on Main Street initially where we did four blocks of Main Street and the first meeting that we had before we actually started construction, I was taken aback because I've lived in communities where those sort of projects are detrimental to the existing businesses. They can kill a business because it's a long process to rebuild a street of that nature. And so we had that first meeting, it was at City Hall, and I remember the engineers presenting this information and saying, "We're going to have Downtown Main Street four blocks essentially closed for months, but we want you all aware of that." And nobody seemed to be excited, which just shocked me.

Justin: Yeah.

Greg: It might have been an indication of how much we needed to revive downtown.

Hugh Walker: It was either that, or they just didn't what the impact would be. But I think you may be more on target. I think they realized this was important because during that entire process, and that was about a nine month project, no one really ever complained. And so we got through that and-

Justin: We're happy to see the improvements in infrastructure, yeah-

Hugh Walker: Yes. And there are some businesses that certainly closed, but there are some that continue to be there to this day. Some that have done even, they've grown. A number that have grown. But I think that was the first step, was seeing that the city was committed through infrastructure projects. And those have been phased in then over time, so we've done more infrastructure projects. But we've also now seen the growth in the private sector and if they wouldn't have come back, our investment would have been for naught. But it was a huge first step for the City Council to say, "We're going to invest four or five million dollars just in this four blocks right here" because that goes back to the early 2000's, late 1990, almost unheard of. But the council was willing to do that. And from that, things have really begun to materialize as you've very well seen.

Hugh Walker: So you have the private sector, they're coming back. They can't do everything necessarily on their own and so we've included some funds that we match depending on what type of improvements they're going to make. So maybe life safety. A building like this, as they go through a renovation process, may be required to put in a sprinkler system. Well, that's a cost that for an old building like this is just almost insurmountable. But we partner with them and we say, "We'll help you pay for part of that."

Greg: Where do you get that money?

Hugh Walker: That is actually city money. That's your tax dollars at work.

Greg: Just your tax dollars.

Hugh Walker: Absolutely, yeah. The city, while we are fortunate enough to get some grant money, a lot of that is more focused on other areas, economic development, and parks, and those sort of things. Not so much when it comes revitalization. But we've been fortunate enough to have some funds available beside grants as well and we want to make sure that downtown's attractive and the City Council passed a policy where we actually have some façade grant money available.

Greg: Does the city own the Queen, which is the movie theater in downtown?

Hugh Walker: It does not. That actually belongs to the Downtown Bryan Association.

Greg: Oh, okay.

Hugh Walker: So that's a non-profit.

Greg: Okay.

Hugh Walker: We did at one time own the LaSalle Hotel.

Greg: Okay.

Hugh Walker: So we were one of the rare cities in not just the state of Texas, but in the nation that owned a hotel. We got into it by default. That hotel, much of their renovation was funded through a community development block grant, so that would have been Federal funding. And the developer at the time, he fell through.

Greg: Yeah.

Hugh Walker: So we stepped in and finished the project and then managed the hotel for a number of years. But I think that hotel, that particular building, and you can name several downtown, I believe, that were the catalyst for what really energized the change for the community.

Justin: I love going to the Queen. Those classic movies and-

Greg: I do too.

Justin: It's fantastic.

Rob Greer: Hugh, it sounds like to get it started was a pretty big risk that the city took, right? If you invest five, six million dollars on street renovations in a failing downtown that continues to fail, then that's five or six million dollars you could have been using somewhere else in the city, right?

Hugh Walker: Absolutely.

Rob Greer: And it paid off for you and that is great. I'm really happy that we're here and able to sort of benefit from that. Can you talk about the discussion around that risk? In taking that risk? A lot of times cities are hesitant to take that risk.

Hugh Walker: Right.

Rob Greer: Especially when it's that level of finance for capital projects that may or may not turn out.

Hugh Walker: There were a number of, I'll use the word discussions, that occurred over a period, really it was probably not months, but years in order to get us there. Again, I came in 1995. That effort started back in probably about 1992, 1993. And one of the first projects was the Palace Theater, which is now an open air

theater. Before that it was a movie theater, but now it's an open air theater that the city owns. So we do own that particular one. So this discussion started years before we actually saw a huge capital project, which would have been the Downtown Main Street. That took a long time to get there and those discussions included the pros and the cons and certainly the funding part of it as very typical for any sort of government project because funds are going to be involved, right?

Hugh Walker: And you also have to take into account that there are folks that are absolutely against it. And there were. There were folks that wondered what we were doing. Why would we throw four or five million, six million dollars at a downtown project for a downtown that is boarded up. You can go back and watch a video back in 1990 of Lyle Lovett-

Greg: Oh, the Lyle Lovett song, yeah.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, This Old Porch.

Greg: This Old Porch, and the town was completely boarded up.

Hugh Walker: Yes. And he walked downtown with a professor from Texas A&M who declared it dead and said it would never come back. And so you had those sort of conversations that were going and a City Council that wanted to do something different. They wanted to do something big and bring life to downtown and so there were a lot debates, if you will, that occurred over a period of literally years before there was a real change and a decision made to move forward with an infrastructure project. You're absolutely right. It's not an easy process and sometimes even longer than you might imagine.

Justin: Can we talk about the case study we did together?

Hugh Walker: Sure.

Justin: Yeah! I got to interview Hugh and the broader City of Bryan team and some researchers at Texas A&M to talk about some self driving trolleys. They were one of the first cities to have a partnership of this type where they had self driving trolleys actually on city roads. So tell us a little bit about that project.

Hugh Walker: Well, that one started, I'm trying to remember how far back we go. Two years? Is that about right?

Justin: That seems right, yeah.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, about two years ago when self driving vehicles were still just this discussion and our Mayor is one of those real innovators. He loves technology and he loves being one of the first to embrace it.

Greg: We should say this is not an endorsement of the Mayor. We are in the midst of an election campaign. Bush School takes absolutely no stance on the Bryan Mayoral Race. Please continue.

Hugh Walker: Nor does Staff, City Staff [crosstalk 00:26:58].

Greg: Right.

Hugh Walker: It's just what happened, that's all. Just stating what happened.

Greg: Right.

Hugh Walker: Because him and the Council, they thought this would be a cool project and, fortunately, A&M also was very excited about this project. And they were pushing, I believe, very hard to be the first city in Texas to have a self driven vehicle. We ended up being, I think, the third city in Texas. So we're in really good company. City of Plano was, I believe, the first if not the City of Arlington. I forget who had the first one, but we were one of the top three. We were the top three. It was a process though that took working with A&M and working through their processes and then through our engineering processes and making sure that we had an environment, a safe environment, a loop that would allow for such an adventure.

Hugh Walker: Because, again, it's self driven, but you still don't know what's going to happen, right? And A&M, Fortunately, they have taken all the safety precautions and the steps. They're the ones that are actually the ones that are responsible for the vehicle. We were responsible for the layout and determining a route for them. And it was a several month process, once again, one of those things that didn't happen overnight. That's one of the reason we weren't the first city in Texas, but I'm sure the others had the same sort of struggles that we did. But, fortunately, because of that partnership, that strong partnership with A&M, we were able to forge ahead and ended up with two self driving vehicles.

Justin: Yep. I got to see them. The lead researcher is [inaudible 00:28:34], who worked closely with the city as well.

Hugh Walker: Right. Paul Castor was a city engineer who was really involved with-

Justin: Yeah, I got to chat with Paul about the different types of problems that the city needed to take on and how we're going to share responsibilities, who was responsible for what. And even things that I didn't think about, which is where do you park the cars? Where do you park the trolleys when they're not being used? Was something that had to be sorted through and figured out-

Hugh Walker: And that's a great point because that's another partner. That's Brazos Transit. They had the downtown parking garage and they graciously offered space for us to park and charge, be able to charge two different vehicles.

Greg: So Brazos Transit is a county?

Hugh Walker: No it is actually, it's a state, it's a Federal entity.

Greg: Federal entity? Okay.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, so they are mostly funded through Federal dollars and the Brazos Transit has a very large area that they cover and they actually operate the trolley system in Galveston. So they cover a large area. The Woodlands, the boats on the water there, they operate those as well. The taxis, boat taxis.

Greg: Oh, wow.

Hugh Walker: So that goes back to one of your... I'm not sure if it's a special district, I'm not exactly sure what you'd call the-

Rob Greer: I'd have to double check. I want to say though that it is a state entity that gets Federal funding.

Hugh Walker: You could be right.

Rob Greer: I don't think it is a Federal entity. It is a state special district that receives Federal funding for operations.

Hugh Walker: I'll take that definition.

Rob Greer: I'll have to double check.

Ann Bowman: I think you're right.

Greg: So the Brazos Transit district extends from Galveston to Bryan?

Rob Greer: This is one of the benefits-

Greg: And includes the Woodlands.

Hugh Walker: Yes.

Greg: Wow.

Rob Greer: This is one of the stated benefits of special districts is that they're not limited to existing boundaries-

Greg: Existing boundaries.

Rob Greer: Of political sub jurisdictions. That they can encompass whatever makes sense for their purpose, right?

Justin: I only have two examples and maybe Anne and Rob you could jump in on this, or Hugh as well, since they're also your examples, but I noticed a few things that if we're talking about strategies for how local governments could be innovative and be successful that maybe we can tease out, which are things like partnerships, and that's partnerships across sectors, with a private sector, but different levels of government. With the county, with the state. Partnerships being one. Finding different types of funding and being a first mover kind of sets the expectations for the private investors to have something that they can build around. Seeing some level of stability. There's a strategic plan and putting years long efforts into some of these and building out the plan and the networks. Looking for opportunities, things that might be innovative and interesting. What other types of things help cities be innovative and be innovative successfully? And deal with some of the risk and hazards that Rob mentioned earlier. Are there general strategies or other cases that anyone's aware of?

Hugh Walker: You mentioned strategic plans, we have a comprehensive plan, which is a very public process to get through the end game of that particular product. It requires a great amount of public input.

Justin: Okay.

Hugh Walker: As well as stake holders. There's Town Hall meetings, there's public meetings, there's individual meetings with different stake holders throughout the community to develop this plan. And most cities have that. Most cities have a comprehensive plan of some sort, similar to A&M. You've got a strategic plan that's-

Justin: In our departments in the Bush School.

Greg: And they're all extremely valuable documents.

Rob Greer: You just volunteered to be on the strategic planning committee. Did I hear that? Is that on record? Is that-

Greg: Unfortunately, I'm always on the strategic planning committee.

Hugh Walker: Ours is actually a document we use.

Greg: Well, that would make it in the minority of strategic plans.

Hugh Walker: But we refer to it on a regular basis, it also includes the Transportation and Thoroughfare Plan. As you have developers come in and want to rezone or develop something, you need to look at the comprehensive plan and see how that all fits together. And, again, the thoroughfare plan is included in there to see if the roadway systems are going to match up and align, if we need to change those. It's not unusual for us to actually end up taking to the City Council an amendment to the comprehensive plan as we change the thoroughfare

plan. It's a dynamic document that we use on a regular basis and at some point in time, usually it's about every ten years, you upgrade those or do a completely new one. For us, it's an important document that was developed through all sorts of public feedback and input as well as stake holder feedback and input. Again, a year to a year and a half to develop one of those.

Greg: How normal is that, Anne and Rob, that a strategic plan for a city really is a guiding document for the way public policy gets implemented?

Ann Bowman: Yeah, I would say it varies. I'm glad to hear that it does play that role. Usually, you don't hear that the comment, "That can't be done because it's not in the plan."

Greg: Right, right.

Ann Bowman: That doesn't happen. Typically, it's how can we adjust the plan? Or how can we just put the plan aside and move ahead? I was really thinking about the, while he was talking about, the proactive nature about something like that, which sort of obviously makes sense. Thinking ahead, as opposed to what so many cities get caught in, which is reaction. And reaction simply to an event, to a problem, to a new challenge they hadn't foreseen and then struggling to get caught back up. The city isn't really first mover, the city is reacting in that way.

Justin: It sounds like one innovation is having a plan and using it.

Ann Bowman: Yeah.

Rob Greer: We'll say most organizations have the plans, right?

Ann Bowman: Yes.

Rob Greer: And sometimes it's in the charter, in the designated book, you have to have a plan, right? Or you have to do one every five years or whatever the case is. And what you're trying to avoid is it being done and then stuck in a drawer and then whenever you have to revise it you pull it out and dust it off and do it again. To Greg's point, I don't know. I don't have any statistics on how many have them and are using them. I will say as a class project, my public management students look into strategic planning processes for a variety of public organizations, and they find mixed results. Some are as successful as Bryan, a lot aren't. But the planning process itself can take many forms, right? Having a comprehensive strategic plan that then coordinates several sub plans like a transit plan or a capital improvement plan or anything like that, is maybe a little bit more rare than having those individual plans for a department be very active and updated documents, right?

Rob Greer: Public Works may have their own capital improvement plans that are regularly used, they just don't integrate with a overall city-wide or region-wide strategic

plan. Transit may have theirs, Public Works may have theirs, and then the Water Utility may have theirs. And it's really whether they talk to each other than whether that they are part of the larger budgeting process or integrate in any meaningful way. That's really less common, in my humble opinion.

Hugh Walker: To some degree they don't always talk well together.

Rob Greer: Right.

Hugh Walker: Fortunately for us, you mentioned Parks Plan. That's part of the comprehensive plan. Those are all tied together. CIP is a different document so we have to really make sure that we are connecting it to the comprehensive plan, which is more of an effort.

Rob Greer: Right.

Hugh Walker: And if you don't focus on that, yeah, sometimes things slip through the cracks, absolutely. Something else that we are somewhat, and this is for all our organizations, and you mentioned that it's nice to be proactive, and that's one thing that a comprehensive plan can do. But technology is so difficult to keep up with. One example I can give you is body worn cameras. That wasn't on anybody's road map, I don't think, until all of a sudden we need body worn cameras. And that's a very expensive process.

Justin: You know what I think would be a really great idea? Is if you had a lot of technological needs and then you had a whole team, where are they? Oh, they're missing. They were here earlier. Where'd they go? There's John. You had a whole team of Texas A&M students to help you figure out what those technological needs are and stay caught up with them.

Hugh Walker: That would be awesome.

Justin: I think that would be a great idea.

Rob Greer: Are you volunteering? To do that for every city in Texas? Is that-

Justin: [crosstalk 00:37:23].

Greg: Let's start with one.

Justin: We should start with one.

Greg: Let's start with one.

Justin: We should do that, Hugh.

Hugh Walker: We should!

Justin: We should do that.

Hugh Walker: That's a great-

Justin: What do you think, John? Do you think it's a good idea?

John: I guess it's something to look at.

Justin: Okay.

John: I don't know if [inaudible 00:37:36] out of all the students.

Justin: I don't know, we'd have to find students that would be interested. You don't think you want to be interested? John's the student lead on the project so we had to bring him in for a minute. I think that highlights the balance between different types of plans, being iterative. I think them being a live document is something that's really important. So you've gotten maybe two, do you have any other examples of innovation that we might discuss?

Hugh Walker: Other examples. Remind me some that were on my list.

Justin: Oh, what were there? We all saw the list and now I'm not sure that I remember what was on-

Greg: Does the self driving trolley, was that just a one off or does it still operate?

Hugh Walker: It still operates. It's based on students schedule for the most part, I think. And it's a limited schedule, very limited, so I can't tell you exactly what that schedule is. But usually it's done over the long shower on Monday through Friday.

Greg: Okay.

Justin: And they do still have just, I find interesting, they do still have two people in the front seats. They have one person who's keeping up with the equipment and one person who can hit the break at any-

Greg: Just in case.

Justin: Just in case. But the trolleys, I think, never go over about fifteen miles an hour.

Hugh Walker: That's correct, right.

Justin: At any point. They just kind of ease along.

Greg: A driven trolley would entail one person, but a self driving trolley entails two people to manage. Okay, I got it.

Justin: And last season we were worried about AI and automation taking over jobs. It was just creating more, see?

Greg: It's good. Yeah, okay. All good. More innovation.

Justin: Yeah, it is more innovation. Go ahead.

Rob Greer: I was going to jump in because the way you framed the question and in addition to the strategic planning process, I just wanted to circle back to the risk issue and one of the things that can be a barrier to innovation and adoption of new technologies or really anything, can be the level of risk that a single entity is willing to take on. A lot of these collaborative agreements, whether it's between a public and private entity or two public entities or multiple or a nonprofits involved, is some version of risk sharing, right? Or risk offloading. That may be financial risk, it may be some version of political risk, it may be about the infrastructure project itself, but if you're talking about being innovative and ways to increase innovation, finding these partnerships that you are not all-in and if it fails, you fail spectacularly, but having a series of partners to help offset some of this risk along the way can be one strategy.

Justin: I think what would be really helpful for the listeners is if you wrote a paper.

Rob Greer: If I wrote a paper?

Greg: Yeah.

Justin: And you called it Managing Risks.

Rob Greer: Oh, okay. Would you like to be co-author on that paper, Justin?

Justin: I would like to be co-author.

Rob Greer: Okay.

Ann Bowman: It's self [crosstalk 00:40:41]-

Greg: There's way too much log rolling going on in this podcast.

Justin: [inaudible 00:40:45].

Greg: This is all-

Rob Greer: Cite Bullock, Greer and O'Tool in 2009. [inaudible 00:40:51] paper on that? Okay, great.

Greg: This is all really too disgusting.

Ann Bowman: Yeah.

Greg: Hugh, how often does the State of Texas come to you and say, "You can't do that."

Justin: I like that question.

Hugh Walker: Boy. Not too often, really.

Ann Bowman: It's because you're not Austin. That's why.

Greg: Right.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, they just usually, we know the parameters that they've established for us and we try to work within those. We try to be creative, but we try to work within those. Seldom do they come to us and say, "No, you can't do that." Seldom do they come to us and say, "You shouldn't have done that" either. We're pretty good about staying within the boundaries of the coloring book.

Greg: But, Anne, you indicate there are municipalities in Texas that do get the State of Texas telling them they can't do that more often.

Ann Bowman: Sure, that is correct. The obvious one is Austin, simply why? Because it's Austin, it's there, it's a left-leaning, some might say cutting edge kind of place where it declare-

Greg: Some might say a weird place.

Ann Bowman: I've heard that before.

Justin: Some might say cutting edge. I like that.

Ann Bowman: Yeah. Things like single use plastic bags would be an example. It's something leadership in Austin was concerned about that issue. They enact an ordinance to basically structure that and make it much more difficult, charge a fee, and the legislature said, "You can't do that." Or they want to become a sanctuary city, although they call themselves a freedom city, not a sanctuary city, you can't do that.

Greg: The whole sanctuary city thing is kind of weird.

Ann Bowman: Right. I don't know.

Greg: What the status of that is.

Ann Bowman: [crosstalk 00:42:32]

Greg: But the plastic bags is real.

Ann Bowman: Plastic bags is real, regulating electric scooters is real, regulating Uber and Lyft is another real one. Airbnbs, all those kinds of things. They really have a very different perspective on that issue and you may have heard that the still current Speaker of the House said about what he was going to do to local governments in the next legislative session, which is basically put them in the cross hairs.

Greg: On the other hand, the Speaker of the House will not be in the next legislative session.

Ann Bowman: Right. Well, no. Exactly. That's very true. Austin often comes to mind when you think about a city that's really moving in a different direction from where legislatures want to go.

Greg: I actually think of Denton. Right?

Ann Bowman: At least for fracking.

Rob Greer: For fracking, right.

Greg: Which had a fracking ban and then the state legislature came in and said, "Oh no. Municipalities cannot ban fracking within the municipal borders." For a state and here I'll go-

Justin: Go ahead.

Greg: Opinionated. But for a state that constantly says that the Federal Government shouldn't tell us what to do because local control, it is very interesting that the State Legislature is quite willing to intervene with local municipalities when the municipality does something that the State Legislature doesn't like.

Ann Bowman: One argument would be that the relationship between the National Government and the state's is a Federal relationship, so the state's do have, do hold, do possess power and that the relationship between states and local governments is different. But you're right. A lot of states do the same thing. They basically complain about the Federal Government, sue the Federal Government, but yet turn right around and impose mandates on local governments regularly.

Greg: And unfunded mandates, right?

Ann Bowman: Yeah, unfunded mandates. Or they preempt local governments from taking action. So, yeah, they behave very much like the Federal Government does.

Greg: Right. That was my point.

Rob Greer: Local control is only good until it gets past the state level, in which case it is no longer good.

Ann Bowman: Yeah. And the other interesting thing is there are a number of folks in the State Legislature who used to be on city councils. They were mayors, they were on city councils, they were commissioners courts. But once you get to Austin, start making rules for the whole state, that seems to fade. There's been some research on this done on the Congressional level about members of Congress who were in state legislatures and how quickly they shed that cloak once they get to Congress.

Justin: Did you say something about a swamp or?

Ann Bowman: Was that it? A swamp, yeah?

Justin: A swamp is what I heard.

Ann Bowman: Yeah, yeah. [crosstalk 00:44:56]

Rob Greer: To balance out the current tone of the conversation, I will say that there is an argument to be made that states can be innovators themselves and help solve problems that local governments because they are concerned about a smaller jurisdiction, a smaller level of solving a problem. Solving something like flooding in South Texas is very difficult for a single jurisdiction to take on. So the state-

Greg: And it's a funding issue. No single municipality can get the money to solve a flooding issue in South Texas.

Rob Greer: Right. If you look across the country you'll find examples of states being innovators to solve these larger scope problems, whereas local governments may not be able to solve those on their own, right? It's not that states are always bad or the antithesis of innovation.

Justin: I'm thinking of the argument for innovation for doing away with a single use bag.

Rob Greer: That's not the type of large scale problem that I had in mind.

Greg: A single use bag is an interesting case, but more for principle than actual-

Justin: What is it called when you do it on social media? Value signaling? I think that's some of it, I don't know. We're almost done, but one more thing on cities we talked about the relationship between risks and innovation and I think risks often maybe drive the need for innovation. What types of, open to anyone, what types of risks in general, we talked about the risk to spending a decent amount of money redoing Main Street, but maybe broader, what kind of issues,

risk issues do we see cropping up for cities now and in the near future? What types of things are cities dealing with from a risk stand point?

Rob Greer: I'd say the immediate one that comes to mind are the variety of environmental risks, right?

Greg: The resiliency issue.

Rob Greer: It is hard to ignore the effects of environmental risks, especially when we're watching California deal with the severity of wildfires they're currently dealing with. Whether it's wildfires or flooding or tornadoes or sea level rise, right? These environmental risks are only getting worse and more frequent and we're seeing, we're getting signals on the financial side from actors like credit rating agencies that are saying if you're not-

Greg: Insurance companies.

Rob Greer: Insurance companies. If you're not paying attention to these risks, if you're not preparing, right? Thinking of longterm planning, if you're preparing for these risks, if you're not doing things to become more resilient than you're a higher financial risk. We're going to signal to investors, "Pay attention."

Greg: And your bonds will cost more and thus your taxes will go up.

Rob Greer: Exactly, yep.

Hugh Walker: And we've been fortunate in that regard so the ISO rating, which is the insurance rating, on a scale of one to ten-

Greg: What does ISO mean?

Hugh Walker: Insurance Service Organization, I think is what it's called so don't quote me on that one. But it's something like that.

Greg: Sorry, you're already quoted.

Hugh Walker: Let me retract that, I don't know what it's called. No. The rating is one to ten and one's the best and recently the City of Bryan received the one rating. And that ties into infrastructure improvements, including water, so that you have the ability to fight fires with it, and also it really touches on your fire department and it being creative and innovative and providing all the necessary training. Talking about risk, you could address some of those. You can't address all of them.

Rob Greer: That's right.

Hugh Walker: And certainly cost, again, comes into play there, but we've gone from... we might've been a four or five at one point to where over a period of time we went from that to a three to a two to now a one.

Greg: And that means you're borrowing is cheaper?

Hugh Walker: That it does. It has an impact there and ideally it also impacts your insurance rates as a homeowner.

Rob Greer: As a homeowner, right. [inaudible 00:49:10] individual property insurance. And I would have to talk about trade offs because there's always trade offs here, right? So when we're talking about risks and we're thinking about how could become more resilient towards risk, in Texas specifically we have these inherent trade offs where you can do something. You can spend a lot of money to become more resilient towards what the last disaster was, which may have been droughts and do nothing about the current disaster, which is flooding. Or you can spend a lot of money to become more resilient towards flooding knowing that next year you may not see any rain and you may be subject towards droughts, right?

Rob Greer: It's difficult from a municipal perspective to be resilient towards everything, but that's what investors want-

Greg: Seems to me floods are more damaging than droughts for a municipality.

Rob Greer: Maybe, until you run out of water.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, unless you're in California.

Greg: Well, unless you're in California [inaudible 00:50:10] wildfires, yeah.

Rob Greer: Or you have significant agricultural needs for watering your crops or providing water for industrial use.

Greg: But is that a municipality issue or?

Rob Greer: A lot of times it can be. Yeah, if you [inaudible 00:50:20] own water sources, water providers, yeah.

Hugh Walker: And there's one other risk that I just have to touch on that wasn't on anybody's radar screen until two or three years ago and that's cyber, cyber risk.

Greg: Oh, right.

Hugh Walker: And the cost to address that. Any government, any entity as far as that goes, if you go back far enough we didn't even have computers, right? That wasn't a

cost. And now our IT, staffing that and funding that is one of the higher funded departments within an organization.

Greg: Has the City of Bryan been subject to cyber attack?

Hugh Walker: We have. Yeah, it was social engineering.

Greg: And what was the outcome?

Hugh Walker: We lost a couple hundred thousand dollars, but we recovered nearly six hundred thousand dollars of that. And one of the reasons we were able to do that, circumstantial, we happen to have a detective with the City of Bryan who was previously in the banking industry and understood how to track money and-

Greg: This was a hostage situation that the cyber attacker took possession of city records, city-

Hugh Walker: They actually, it was social engineering is was they did. They contacted staff, asked to have the way that certain funds were paid to a vendor changed, and we went through a process and made that change. And then we got a call from the real vendor who said, "I'm not getting paid anymore."

Greg: "I'm not getting paid." Yeah.

Hugh Walker: Yeah. So our detective was able to track that down and recover most of the funds.

Greg: Okay.

Hugh Walker: Which as we read and hear about other organizations, whether they be public or private, almost never happens.

Greg: Right.

Hugh Walker: But, again, very fortunate there. And he was involved in making arrests in Atlanta because he was instrumental in solving that particular crime.

Greg: Promote this guy.

Ann Bowman: Yeah, really.

Hugh Walker: Yeah, he is good. Really good.

Justin: Before we go I want to go to the audience. Anne, did you have any risks that you wanted to toss in the bucket to make us aware of?

Ann Bowman: Yeah, I guess, the risk I was much more amorphous, but it's the risk of just rising demands among the public and the expectations of government to solve problems and something that is an individual issue for you can be promoted to become an issue citywide, potentially. And I think that's always a challenge for local governments to try to anticipate and respond when that happens. Which ones of these demands are viable and should be responded to, and which can be safely ignored? We get into questions of political risk, but it's up to the leadership to do something with that. I just think that's a challenge, a continuing challenge.

Justin: Trying to interpret the citizens demands into what needs to be done.

Greg: Yeah.

Justin: That's a good one. Okay, well, thank you so much. We'll see if our audience happens to have any questions.

Greg: The vast crowd that has come to-

Justin: The whole sea of them.

Rob Greer: Just there are hundreds here. I know you can't see on the podcast, but just so many people came out to see us.

Greg: Spilling out into the streets of Bryan.

Rob Greer: Exactly.

Justin: Questions, yes?

Speaker 7: Last spring Secretary of State Mike Pompeo came to speak with us and there was a question asked about United States withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accords. And his response was interesting. He said that allowing United States to withdraw gives cities the opportunity to have innovation and create their own climate action plans. Do you agree with this approach? How is this helpful for cities to create their own climate action plans? Is it innovative or do you think the United States should be taking at this from a national approach?

Greg: The question is that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo came down to the Bush School last semester.

Speaker 7: It was, I think, March.

Greg: March of this year and one of the justifications for the criticisms raised about the United States withdraw from the Paris Climate Accords is Secretary Pompeo said, "Well, this frees up cities to be much more innovative in dealing with climate issues on their own." Was that just eye wash? Was that just eye wash?

Rob Greer: Oh, boy.

Ann Bowman: Yeah, cities are already taking the lead on this. There are what? How many hundreds of cities belong to the International Climate Change group? So cities are making tremendous efforts in that regard, but the problem is there are city led efforts that are not necessarily sweeping the country and as a consequence the impact is very limited.

Rob Greer: I would say it is very much a second best type of solution to the problem. Just like earlier we talked about cities not being able to handle things, certain problems that the state then steps in and provides some leadership on. Well, climate change is not something cities can solve by themselves, states cannot solve by themselves. Countries have to step up and provide leadership there.

Greg: And countries can't solve by themselves.

Rob Greer: And countries can't solve by themselves. That's exactly right. But the lower that you devolve that responsibility, authority, and power the more fragmented the response becomes and I think we can find plenty of examples of cities taking very strong leadership roles that we can point out and give them, sort of commend them for doing that. But I don't think that's a great justification for the US not also providing leadership in that area.

Ann Bowman: Yeah.

Greg: Hugh, does Bryan have a climate change plan?

Hugh Walker: No, we do not. And I'm going to defer back to Rob. I think he is right on target. Smaller, midsize cities, that's something that we don't have the expertise and so we defer frequently to the state when we get calls of those natures. And we depend on the state. Texas Commission on the Environmental Quality is one of their departments who works closely with EPA, which is the national side of things, and so for something like that, we would defer to them. And I would think most cities our size would probably do the same thing. Houston is going to be an exception, Dallas, Ft. Worth, those size of cities would be an exception. I think, absolutely, it becomes a much larger problem than a smaller, midsize city can handle.

Justin: Pompeo's argument was a global coordination problem should be sent down to local cities in the US?

Ann Bowman: Yeah.

Justin: That was the argument?

Ann Bowman: Yeah. Think globally, act locally, right? That sort of...

Rob Greer: Which, again, is problematic in Texas when you might want to start thinking about ways to reduce carbon emission and then you have the example that Greg brought up of the City of Denton trying to do just that with banning fracking. And the state disallowing that type of action. Cities can only, they are as Anne started the conversation with, they are creatures of the state. They can only do what the state allows them to do and if the state will not allow them to act in certain ways, they are unable to solve those types of problems.

Greg: Here at Bush School Uncorked our motto is actually Think Global, Drink Local.

Justin: Yeah. It's a better approach.

Greg: Yeah.

Justin: I think we had at least one more question. Yes, sir?

Speaker 8: [inaudible 00:57:49] so my question is, [inaudible 00:57:50] of labeling [inaudible 00:57:50], which is great, I think. [inaudible 00:57:57] I want to know whether there is any mechanism to share knowledge, best practices, what works, what doesn't, lessons learned across different cities in Texas, so that you learn from each other?

Rob Greer: Oh, absolutely.

Justin: The question is, are there datasets or collected cases of innovation done well in a local city, particularly in Texas as some examples.

Hugh Walker: Yes. We belong to different organizations. The city belongs to the Texan Municipal League as well as the National League of Cities. So that's one way to share information. Individually, we belong to associations as well, such as the Texas City County Management Association, International City County Management Association, and then departments also belong to and individuals in departments belong to different associations. Networking and sharing information, sharing is absolutely key for us. Seldom, it does happen every now and then, but seldom do we create our own document.

Greg: Right.

Hugh Walker: Our own policy. If we're going to enter into a contract, we go out and we beg, borrow, or steal from someone else. Not necessarily just in Texas even. We have counterparts across the nation that we rely on and use for information and information sharing. Just as they call us, we call them. For almost anything that we work on, there's somebody else that's already done it and we want to learn from them first before we make the wrong step and then we implement the policy based on what we're able to gain from our peers.

Greg: Being able to access best practice is just so important, whether it's at the university level, municipal level, any level.

Hugh Walker: And let me put a plug there as well. Texas A&M is a tremendous resource for us as well.

Greg: You're welcome.

Hugh Walker: Well, thank you. Because we rely on so many different departments there too. If we have a question, it's not unusual for us to start there with making a phone call, an E-mail, or stopping in to visit with somebody.

Rob Greer: And I'll just say from the academic literature perspective, there's been a lot done on innovation diffusion and policy diffusion and how best practices are spread from one type of state or city to another. And often times, it takes a policy entrepreneur. It takes somebody who takes point on something and then you go to a conference and you spread the good news we're doing this great thing, it's sending us a ton of money, our citizens are really happy with this new outcome. And then it's up to the innovative cities and leadership to say, "Hey, we can do this better than we've being doing it" and adopt those policies. And they spread by person to person, city to city, through these types of networks of individuals.

Ann Bowman: And they spread not only horizontally like you're describing, but also vertically to states, the state level. There's a really good study of anti-smoking policies that started at the city level and they moved to the state level. Even someday, the Federal level.

Rob Greer: That's the classic model too, right? The states are supposed to serve as this policy laboratory, right? Where the best ideas get circulated and adopted at the Federal level. I don't know what the most recent research would say about the success of that model, but-

Ann Bowman: I don't know. Yeah, ask me in a couple years when we're talking about recreational marijuana nationwide.

Rob Greer: Right, right.

Ann Bowman: Then we'll know. It started at the states.

Greg: That's for sure.

Justin: Thanks so much, it's been an hour. Kept you for an hour and one minute. We will be respectful of your time and close out this evening. Thanks to the audience for the questions.

Greg: A hundred. The hundreds here.

Rob Greer: [crosstalk 01:01:36]

Justin: The hundreds.

Rob Greer: Yeah.

Justin: Thousand. Thousands at Downtown Uncorked tonight. That would be a fire hazard, we can't have that.

Ann Bowman: That would.

Rob Greer: The appropriate number to show up would be a respectable crowd.

Justin: Our next live recording will not be until the beginning of December. I believe it is December 3rd, is when we record again, but in the meantime we may be pushing out some episodes anyways.

Greg: We might do Hot Takes.

Justin: Yeah. We might do a Hot Takes.

Greg: There's plenty in the news.

Justin: We managed to avoid international issues. There are still things internationally going on since last week.

Greg: One or two.

Justin: And I don't think impeachment's stopped yet since our last event either.

Greg: As far as I know, it's still going on.

Justin: We have some things on top of our exciting local governments to discuss.

Greg: Maybe Hot Takes on the Bryan Mayoral election by then.

Justin: Then we could. When is the election date?

Hugh Walker: Next Tuesday.

Greg: Yeah.

Justin: Next Tuesday.

Greg: The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, which is the election date in America.

Ann Bowman: Really.

Greg: Yeah.

Justin: Thanks Rob, thanks Hugh, thanks Anne. Glad you're back, Greg.

Greg: I'm so happy to be back, Justin.

Justin: And we will see you soon.

Greg: And thank you to our friends at Downtown Uncorked.

Ann Bowman: Definitely.

Justin: Always got you covered.

Greg: Yeah.