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PUBLISHER'S DESK

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Farewell to Otis White

Otis White has gone out with a splash.

For five years, Otis has been writing a column called Urban Notebook for our Web site. It was updated daily, and then the best of what he had produced was included in a column that ran in the magazine every month. We made such a commitment because it had evolved into one of the very best sources available for trends and analysis of what was going on in American metro areas and regions. Evidently, our readers thought so, too, because Urban Notebook became one of the most-visited pages on our site.

Now, it's time to say goodbye to an old friend, whom we admire enormously for his witty writing, his probing analysis and his open-minded, non-dogmatic observations on what's happening in urban areas all over the country. After writing some 1,200 columns, Otis has decided to move on to do something else, which I'll describe in a minute.

As I said, Otis has gone out with a splash, ending his tenure here with a terrific retrospective on everything he has written over the past five years called "A Farewell: Seven Big Lessons for Local Governments." You can see it for yourself at Governing.com/notebook.htm.

You may agree or disagree with his seven lessons. Or more likely you may agree but think some of them are politically difficult to pull off. Not everyone will buy his arguments that we ought to make cities more dense, or that we should stop whittling away at the property tax, or that it's possible to throw the bums out who don't work hard enough or are ethically challenged. But in every lesson, Otis takes you back to previous columns to make his case, presenting you with real-life examples of people who are doing it successfully and why.

We have known Otis for a long time because he came out of the same company that owns Governing. Eight years ago, he founded a public policy consulting firm in Atlanta called Civic Strategies, which specializes in cities and regions. That vantage point was perfect for reporting and writing Urban Notebook, but now the firm is taking a new direction, analyzing how communities make important decisions.

Sounds to me like fodder for a new, equally useful column for urban leaders. In the meantime, Governing's associate editor, Christopher Swope, will take up the Urban Notebook mantle.