

# SOUTHERN CITY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



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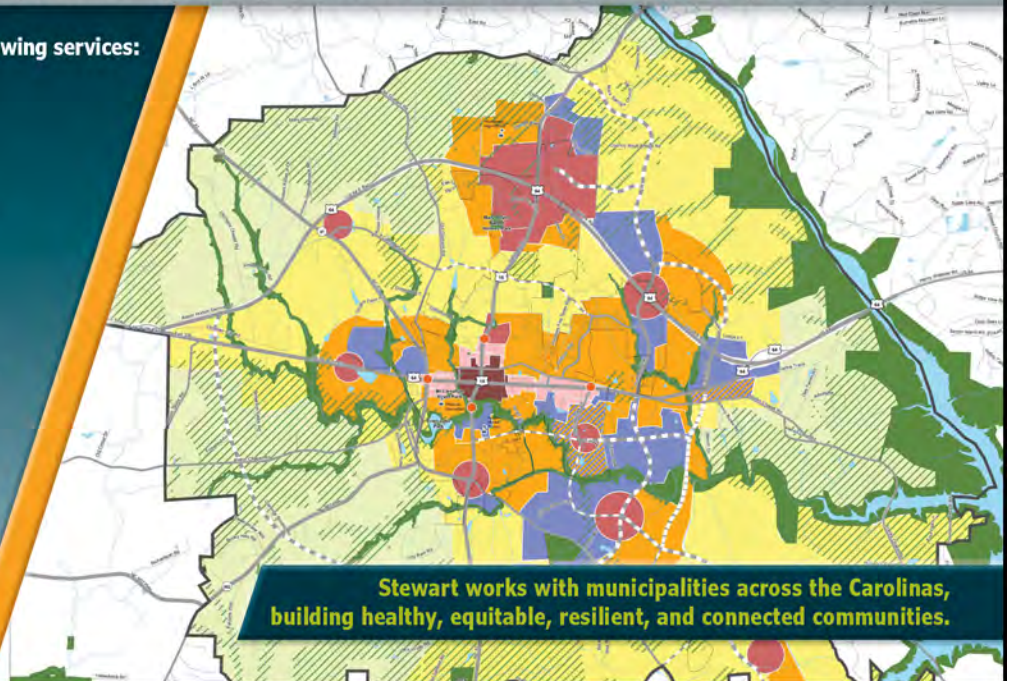
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## TJ WALKER: ROCKY MOUNT'S COMMUNITY LEADER



## SOUTHERN CITY

*Southern City* is a publication for and about North Carolina municipalities, published quarterly by the North Carolina League of Municipalities.

**Volume 74**  
**Number 2**  
**2nd Quarter 2024**

**Executive Director &**

**Publisher:** Rose Vaughn Williams

**Editor:** Isabella Mormando

**Writers:** Ben Brown, Jack Cassidy, Stephanie Hughes, Scott Mooneyham

**Photography:** Ben Brown, Donald Hughes, Stephanie Hughes, Isabella Mormando, Desmond Worrell

**[www.nclm.org](http://www.nclm.org)**

*Southern City* (USPS 827-280) is published quarterly for \$25 per year (\$2 per year to member municipalities, \$1 for single copies) by the North Carolina League of Municipalities.

**Phone:** 919-715-4000

**Postmaster:**

Send address changes to:  
*Southern City*  
434 Fayetteville Street, Suite 1900  
Raleigh, NC 27601

**Advertising & Design:**



**Advertising Sales:** John Constantino

**Design & Layout:** Jon Cannon

For advertising opportunities and deadlines, contact LLM Publications at 503-445-2230 or [john@llmpubs.com](mailto:john@llmpubs.com).

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**PUBLISHED SUMMER 2024**



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## WRITERS THIS ISSUE



**BEN BROWN**  
Communications and  
Multimedia Strategist



**JACK CASSIDY**  
Learning and Development  
Project Manager



**STEPHANIE HUGHES**  
Communications & Multimedia  
Strategist (ARP)



**SCOTT MOONEYHAM**  
Director of Political Communication  
& Coordination



**ISABELLA MORMANDO**  
Communications Associate



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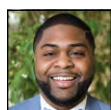
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# **SPEAKING OUT**

## **NCLM Is Its Members**



**MARK-ANTHONY MIDDLETON**  
NCLM President

Over several weeks in March and April, NCLM took its Town & State Dinner on the road, hosting five regional events across the state rather than our more traditional single event in Raleigh.

The events, of which two I had the pleasure to serve as NCLM host, presiding officer and sort of emcee, showed the truly remarkable nature that a simple meal and conversation can have when it comes to human understanding and relationship-building. While I and other League officers, along with one or two legislators and a host city mayor, offered brief comments at each, the real star of the show was the bonding that took place over breaking bread.

You could see it in the close conversations at the tables, in the lingering photo-taking and more talk as the meal was finished, and in the smiles and good-byes as municipal officials and legislators departed.

As my term begins as president of the North Carolina League of Municipalities, these events were a shining example of the importance of the involvement of every one of you—the elected and appointed municipal officials of this state—in this organization. My greatest hope over the next year is that we can expand that involvement, that more cities and towns and their local representatives will become more involved in NCLM, and that we allow more officials in cities and towns to see its importance in establishing benefits that accrue to residents of each.

A key strength of North Carolina is the diversity of its cities and towns, and the rich array of small, medium-sized, and larger municipalities. No one city or town is alike, regardless of its size, the economic fabric, the demographics, or the topography. Yes, we all have common aspirations for a solid economy, strong community connections and vibrant quality of life for residents, but our diversity and distinct community visions act as a strength.

And nowhere is that more important than in our relationships with state legislators and other state officials.

We enhance that strength through the involvement of more cities and towns,

and their elected and appointed officials. Participation in events like the Town and State Dinner, but also through trainings and services offered by NCLM, are crucial not just to our state advocacy, but in making our towns and cities better places for our residents. Creating strong examples of those benefits serves to only spread the news.

Obviously, as we progress into 2024, NCLM has other challenges as well.

Continuing to advance the use and redevelopment of the League campus in downtown Raleigh in the best way possible remains a crucial aspect of the organization's future. The decisions that we make will prove to be critical to our finances going forward, and I look forward to those discussions moving forward to ensure that we remain well-grounded from a business standpoint.

Finally, as a longtime member of the NCLM Board of Directors and through my involvement in the organization over the years, I know that this organization is in the best place that it may have ever been. Our advocacy and services are as robust and as effective as ever.

Part of my charge as president, and that of all of our board and members, is to be a strong caretaker of the organization, to ensure that we continue on this path of working effectively together for the better of each of our cities and towns individually and for our state collectively.

As I said in my swearing-in address at our CityVision conference, the League is embarking on what I believe will be a defining and monumental chapter in our history. From securing zoning for up to 40 stories on prime downtown Raleigh real estate, to an historic infusion of ARPA funds from our state legislature to help our towns and cities reach their full potential, to solidifying and building upon our relationships on both sides of the aisle, we should all be excited!

When the League calls, that phone is answered, and when the League knocks, doors get opened. As your new president, I want to protect our brand, extend our influence, and grow our ranks. ■



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# **Middleton, Hall and McLeod to Lead NC League**

## **NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES ANNOUNCES NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS AT CITYVISION 2024**

**ISABELLA MORMANDO**  
Communications Associate



**D**urham Mayor Pro Tem Mark-Anthony Middleton will lead the North Carolina League of Municipalities as president over the next year.

Middleton was chosen by representatives from cities and towns across North Carolina with his selection announced in April at the League's annual conference, CityVision 2024, held in Winston-Salem, NC.

Joining Middleton as officers for the organization are Albemarle Mayor Pro Tem Martha Sue Hall and Clayton Mayor Jody McLeod as first and second vice presidents, respectively, and Fuquay-Varina Commissioner William Harris as immediate past president.

CityVision 2024 included in-depth sessions, presentations and discussions of key topics including citizen engagement, interpersonal work dynamics, employee recruitment and retention, civility, leadership and other key issues facing municipalities.

Middleton's selection as president follows seven years of public service for the City of Durham. Prior to his elected service, Middleton was already a prominent member of his community as CEO and Pastor at Abundant Hope Christian Church. In addition to his work as a pastor, Middleton served in a leadership position for Durham Congregations, Associations and Neighborhoods, one of the most influential grassroots organizations in the city. Middleton attended North Carolina A&T State University and Duke Divinity School.



The North Carolina League of Municipalities is the most authoritative voice for our cities, towns and villages precisely because we focus on what local leaders always focus on—results. **I will be a president that leverages relationships on both sides of the aisle to benefit the smallest hamlet to our most bustling city.**

» **Mark-Anthony Middleton**, Mayor Pro Tem, Durham, NCLM President

In his remarks at CityVision, Middleton spoke about his desire to continue to promote the League's services to all members across North Carolina.

"The North Carolina League of Municipalities is the most authoritative voice for our cities, towns and villages precisely because we focus on what local leaders always focus on—results. I will be a president that leverages relationships on both sides of the aisle to benefit the smallest hamlet to our most bustling city. The menu of services and benefits the League offers to our

members is outstanding and I will be a brand ambassador for them from Dare to Cherokee."

League Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams said Middleton, through his commitment to local government, will bring strong leadership to the organization.

"We are so fortunate to have Mayor Pro Tem Middleton lead the North Carolina League of Municipalities this year. His enthusiasm and strong belief in the important role local leaders play in the

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success of the state are an inspiration to all our members,” said Williams.

In addition to NCLM officers, newly-elected members of the Board of Directors, are:

- Southern Shores Mayor Elizabeth Morey, District 1
- Whiteville Mayor Terry Mann, District 3
- Rocky Mount Council Member TJ Walker, District 5
- Laurinburg Council Member Mary Jo Adams, District 7
- Lewisville Mayor Mike Horn, District 9
- Belmont Mayor Richard Turner, District 11
- Newport Mayor Dennis Barber, at-large
- Mayodan Mayor Dwight Lake, at-large
- Charlotte Council Member Marjorie Molina, large city seat
- Durham Mayor Leonardo Williams, large city seat
- Greensboro Mayor Pro Tem Yvonne Johnson, large city seat
- High Point Manager Tasha Logan Ford, Municipal Manager
- New Bern Clerk Brenda Blanco, City Clerk
- Greenville Attorney Emanuel McGirt, City Attorney ▣







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| <b>Top 10 Primer: Transportation Planning and Funding in NC</b><br><b>August 14</b> Online<br><b>2 CREDITS</b>  |  | <b>Affordable Housing Seminar</b><br><b>October 4</b> Location TBD<br><b>6 CREDITS</b>                                |
| <b>Fiduciary Responsibilities of Local Elected Officials</b><br><b>November 13</b> Online<br><b>3 CREDITS</b>   |  | <b>Strategic Planning: Linking Strategies to Results</b><br><b>October 23</b> Online<br><b>6 CREDITS</b>              |
| Program information: <a href="http://go.unc.edu/LELA">go.unc.edu/LELA</a><br>Course information: <a href="http://go.unc.edu/LELACalendar">go.unc.edu/LELACalendar</a> |  | <b>Development Finance Toolbox</b><br><b>December 3-5</b><br>Chapel Hill<br><b>6 CREDITS</b>                          |



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# Aiming for Financial Health in Small-Town Government

STEPHANIE HUGHES

Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)

**T**he League is launching its Accounting Instruction & Mentorship (AIM) program. The goal of this program is to improve the financial health of towns that have not historically had the resources and support available that is needed to thrive. The League hopes to accomplish this by providing towns with customized instruction on general accounting procedures, practical guidance and resources to keep finance departments on track, and catch-up bookkeeping and auditing services for towns that may be behind. Beyond the deliverable resources, it will also provide towns with hands-on learning experiences from a dedicated mentor and foster an environment for finance officers to ask questions specific to their situation.

"I am most excited about the relationships that are forming between our League staff and small towns," Carla Obiol, NCLM's chief American Rescue Plan (ARP) officer, said. "The towns that we have met with are very excited about this mentorship program because, in many cases, if they simply had someone to turn to in order to ask basic questions, that would make their job and their experience so much better."

This program stems from the League's Municipal Accounting Services (MAS), which launched in September 2022 as a part of the League's new service offerings funded by the ARP. The state legislature tasked the League with investing its designated ARP funds into supporting cities and towns across the state. The MAS program was designed to promote better financial accountability and reliability for smaller governments and includes a full software conversion to Black Mountain Software and additional accounting guidance and training from NCLM staff. However, the League soon realized that a full conversion was not always in the best interest of these small towns, therefore, the League launched AIM and determined that this program would provide the same accounting assistance as MAS, without software conversion.

"We began asking the question: How can we meet towns where they are? I think it is important that we are trying to give them what they need instead of the League prescribing what we think they need," Obiol shared. "The AIM program provides that easier, how-to, step-by-step approach to having a strong financial process in a town."

The League is partnering with towns across the state on the program's initial launch and will assign each town a dedicated mentor to work with the finance staff, management and elected officials in the town. The AIM program may look different in each town as the League will tailor the services to fit that town's individual needs.



NCLM Chief American Rescue Plan (ARP) Officer, Carla Obiol



We began asking the question: **How can we meet towns where they are?**

I think it is important that we are trying to give them what they need instead of the League prescribing what we think they need.

» **Carla Obiol**, Chief American Rescue Plan (ARP) Officer, NCLM





NCLM Deputy Director for Municipal Accounting Services, Diane Seaford

**AIM, it seems, will be a one-stop shop for all your needs, no matter what they are** ... I do not know that there is anything I can ask them that they cannot find me an answer for, which is really nice. **I wish this had been in place two years ago.**

» Joel Killion, Town Clerk, Bailey

#### The program will include:

- One-on-one mentorship, both in-person and virtually
- Comprehensive training manual including checklists, templates, and other practical tools for finance staff
- On-demand training videos and written guidance via blog posts and other publications
- Small group training when possible
- Catch-up bookkeeping services, if needed
- Auditor procurement, if needed

The League has seen how towns across the state have struggled in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and competing in an economy where costs have continued to increase. In addition to frequent staff turnover, which can contribute to a town getting behind with its bookkeeping and audits, finding auditors who can complete its annual audits has

proved difficult for many small-town governments. These factors can play into towns falling behind on the required audits and then needing to put in additional work to get caught up and remain on target.

In preparation for this program's launch, the League hosted dinners across the state to introduce the AIM program to towns, receive feedback and allow attendees to ask questions. The Town of Bailey was at one of these dinners. Bailey's town clerk, Joel Killion, shared his initial impression of the program.

"AIM, it seems, will be a one-stop shop for all your needs, no matter what they are ... I do not know that there is anything I can ask them that they cannot find me an answer for, which is really nice," Killion said. "I wish this had been in place two years ago."

The Town of Newport also attended one of the AIM program dinners and Newport Mayor Dennis Barber emphasized his staff's excitement over being a part of the launch of this program.

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**I think what [the League] does is amazing.** We're so grateful for any help and [the League] coming in to help I think will make more of a smooth transition for the next folks that run for office. So, **we are looking ahead toward the future for them.**

» **Dennis Barber**, Mayor, Newport





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"I had the finance director with me and her assistant and the first time they heard it, they jumped all over it. They were really happy to know the program would be there. So, we were ready to go and if we could have had [the League] show up the next day, we would be ready for that," Barber shared. "They gave a presentation that was easy to understand what they were there for, what the mission would be and what opportunities we would have to work more with the League."

As the program gets underway this summer, hopes are high for how this program will be able to reach towns where they are and provide assistance that walks alongside them and sets them up to be successful moving forward.

"We want it to be an opportunity for the town's employees to learn how to have a healthy financial process in place. ... We are going to get their accounting caught up. We are going to help them

get their audits caught up. More importantly, what we want to achieve is that we want them to then know how to stay caught up and not to get behind," Obiol said. "They walk into jobs that have quite a bit of responsibility and tasks and oftentimes with very little instruction or training...so hopefully we will provide that general foundation for small towns that they have never been able to receive."

The inaugural towns that will be a part of AIM are optimistic about how this program will support them in running their town finances more efficiently and provide them with a solid foundation that can be passed on as the town moves toward the future.

"I think what [the League] does is amazing," Barber said. "We're so grateful for any help and [the League] coming in to help I think will make more of a smooth transition for the next folks that run for office. So, we are looking ahead toward the future for them." ▣





# Driven By Connection

**BEN BROWN**

NCLM Communications and Multimedia Strategist

## DURHAM'S SEN. MIKE WOODARD ADDS NCLM'S ANNUAL COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD TO HIS ALREADY BUSY SHELVES.

The Legislative Office Building that houses the workspaces of so many North Carolina legislators in downtown Raleigh sometimes gives that blank-canvas feeling—the governmental beige or off-white walls that are ready to pop with a bit of personal decoration: framed memories, pieces of art, shelves for influential books, gifts and honors, flags, various mementos. If any group or agency handed out awards for excellence in this way, Sen. Mike Woodard could add it to his vibrant, loaded shelves of literature, art and sculptures near the colorful, framed showbill for rock musician Alejandro Escovedo, amid gallery walls of other artworks and personal interests. These items became operative parts of a recent interview *Southern City* did with Sen. Woodard in his office. Gesturing to or picking up pieces from his shelves and walls, he would explain their connection to his work—connection the emphasized word as the senator has long expressed his appreciation for the power of meeting with and listening to peers and constituents for informed ideas and good outcomes. A photo of him with a beloved neighborhood leader, or a framed quote from history, or an item he was honored to receive in reflection of his work, were all in the mix of conversation.

While shelf space was truly limited, Sen. Woodard did have one more item to add as of late April, when the League invited him to its 2024 CityVision conference, held in Winston-Salem, to present him with this year's NCLM Community Champion Award. "This award recognizes those that work tirelessly to understand, represent and advocate for the needs of cities and towns," said NCLM immediate past president William Harris, town commissioner from Fuquay-Varina, from the conference podium. "Senator Woodard more than meets those criteria."

*Southern City* caught up with him in his busy Raleigh office just after the April conference, right as the 2024 short session of the General Assembly was getting underway. Elected in 2013, Sen. Woodard will depart the office at the end of this term for what he knows will entail community involvement and the making of local-level connections, a topic we wanted to hear more about from the senator.

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**So, as we speak now, the 2024 legislative session is cranking up. Tell us how things are going.**

**MW:** Well, it's the beginning of session so lots of bills are coming, and of course with the short session it's always a lot of local bills, trying to manage those. In fact [*Sen. Woodard picks up a document on his desk*] right here are my notes from my meeting with Durham City Council yesterday, so we're working through bills and obviously look at the revenue picture to see where funding priorities can go, right? And there are lots of folks who are showing up to get into our legislation or appropriations, one way or the other.



**How have you handled that? When it comes to the local governments in your district, what they want and what you're able to do up here?**

**MW:** I've always put a high priority on meeting with my local governments before session... So, it's always meeting to see what policy changes they need, if there are any special appropriations that they're needing and anything that's budgetary, likely to be the governor or legislature's budget. And then working with our delegation to see that we're in concert with or in agreement with the local priorities. There have been times when we've had some local requests that we weren't always in agreement with. And then just prioritizing, looking to see what has the most impact for the residents of the county or the city or town.

**What do you think is helpful from local governments in that regard? What are some good practices for local governments that might help with legislative requests?**

**MW:** Obviously now just representing Durham—I live in Durham; I've never lived in Oxford or Roxboro or Yanceyville, those towns and other towns that I've represented. So, I'd always rely on those folks to tell me what it was they needed and make sure I understand what the needs are. There's (former) Mayor (Terry) Turner from Butner; a few years back, they had need of acquiring some of the property that the state had. So just making sure I understood what Butner wanted to do with it and all that and securing that for them. So, the key I think is for the towns, cities, these elected officials, to stay in touch with their legislative delegation, meeting with them before session, but meeting with them other times too. If your legislator doesn't live in your town or county, you know, if you're a county or two away, as sometimes we often are, or in some of these less populated districts, you could be five or six counties away from a town that has a need. So just making sure you stay in touch with them throughout and understanding what the priorities are for that town or city and just keeping the dialogue going is just so important.



**It just was always second nature for me. I guess it was just kind of, you know, in my DNA, I guess.** And I always enjoyed volunteering and helping out in the community. I put my roots down in Durham, settled there, and got involved in my neighborhood and some of the civic things that I did there. Just, you know, one step.

» **Sen. Mike Woodard**, 22<sup>nd</sup> District, Durham County

**Given the dedication you have to have for a role like this, in public service, what was the draw to where you would want to run for office and be a part of it?**

**MW:** Oh gosh. Well, I grew up in a family that was always active in our community, church work or in our neighborhood civic groups, whatever it was. So, I saw my parents do it and I would often go with them to volunteer or go to church. So, it just was always second nature for me. I guess it was just kind of, you know, in my DNA, I guess. And they were role models for me and work they did in the community. And I always enjoyed volunteering and helping out in the community. I put my roots down in Durham, settled there, and got involved in my neighborhood and some of the civic things that I did there. Just, you know, one step. Mine was a gradual kind of wade into it. So, I'd be reacting to a lot of different community groups and neighborhood groups, things like that. Durham, which is a unique community, we have something called the InterNeighborhood Council. It's the association of neighborhood associations. And I was my neighborhood's representative to the InterNeighborhood Council. And at the time there were three or so neighborhood associations around Durham.

And there's where you get to know what's going on all over town, neighborhood by neighborhood. So, the issues in the Watts Hospital neighborhood, where I live, are very different than what Walltown's going through. And that's totally different than what the Herndon Road community's going through or what Campus Hills is going through, just to think of different geographic neighborhoods, or Old North Durham or Willowhaven. But you get to see what's going on. I just found it fascinating to help. So, I became president, I was president of the InterNeighborhood Council, and in my term I was vice president, which is essentially president-elect. So for the couple of years I had an office in the Inter-Neighborhood Council, some great and interesting work and took on some real interesting issues and really became a voice for our neighborhoods. It was time for a city council election, a lot of people said, "You'd be great at that." And so, I said yeah, I might enjoy it. So that's sort of how I got there. I had worked with neighborhoods all over town. I showed up on day one with a pretty good knowledge of what I thought some of the needs, concerns and opportunities for the city were. I joke with people. I was sworn in on a Monday night. And I have a picture here. My parents swearing me in...

continues on page 20





**I hope people will approach living in community together with an open mind, with open ears, maybe an open heart.** And, like I said, just understanding what's going on in that other community, what their needs are, not coming into that community with preconceived ideas based on race or class or income or any other human thing that divides us. **And just being open to hearing how we can live and work together in community.**

» Sen. Mike Woodard, 22<sup>nd</sup> District, Durham County

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#### What year was that?

**MW:** 2005. And then the next morning at 8:00, literally 12 hours later, I was at my first (Metropolitan Planning Organization) meeting working on transportation. I mean, I just jumped right in. In a way that must have just kind of felt OK, I guess.

**Right, and I think we all know abstractly that lives are different for different kinds of people in different places, but knowing more specifically what these contexts are can be a challenge. So, you saw neighborhoods and their people sharing context together, which showed the nuance.**

**MW:** Yeah, you'd think, "Our side of town has the same challenges." No, they don't. You know, just a couple

neighborhoods away is a very different situation. Where I live is Watts Hospital. Walltown is next to me. And Broad Street. A predominantly, overwhelmingly white neighborhood, a historic black neighborhood. And you could look at the differences in how things were invested. My relatively small neighborhood had two city parks in it within about five blocks of each other. Walltown, a much larger neighborhood, and mostly black residents, had no city parks area. They had built a building, the neighbors had built a building and had their own little space, but it wasn't a city-run park. And until you know some of the history and recognize those things, you know, you might say, "They could just come over and play in our parks." Well, that's not quite the same. And so I was real proud—four, five, six blocks away from me, where I lived, is getting a sizable recreation center in their community... You don't





know those things until you work in those communities, learn their history, learn what made them into the community they are. In fact, I got a picture of the groundbreaking. *[Sen. Woodard picks up a framed photo from a crowded shelf next to his desk]* That's the groundbreaking right there ... for the Walltown Park Recreation Center. And, wow. Wilma Holmes was one of the leaders of the Walltown community and we were so proud that day of working on that. So, working with the matriarchs and patriarchs—mostly matriarchs—of that community, and I've just run out of room obviously for these pictures, but I keep them close by for that reason...

**With everything we just talked about, what do you think are a few good takeaways in terms of communication, civility, working in a sometimes-tense kind of world but identifying the kinds of issues that you can talk about together to get things done?**

**MW:** I hope people will approach living in community together with an open mind, with open ears, maybe an open heart. And, like I said, just understanding what's going on in that other community, what their needs are, not coming into that community with preconceived ideas based on race or class or income or any other human thing that divides us. And just being open to hearing how we can live and work together in community. Sounds a bit idealistic, I guess. But just being open to that. And I think as leaders it's our job to go into those communities. *[Sen. Woodard picks up another framed image with the words, "Go to the people. Live with them. Learn from them. Love them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. With the best leaders, when the work is done, the task accomplished, the people will say, "We have done this ourselves."]* It's kind of a mantra for me. Lao Tzu, founder of Taoism, an artist, a fantastic quote and I always loved it... I always tried to do it in my work representing different communities here at the General Assembly because, you know, I came up through Durham and, you know, over the last few decades, we've been very successful in some ways. We have our challenges, obviously, but we've been successful in some ways. But I never wanted to go into Roxboro or Yanceyville or Oxford or Butner and say, "Hey, this is what you all need to do." You know, take the lessons I've learned and go listen... We don't know everything, we shouldn't know everything. These are part-time jobs for goodness sake. Whether you work here or in your home community, these are part-time jobs. The best thing we can do is to be that connector. So, you know, connecting the Butner officials with the Durham folks and just let them come in and see, pick and choose which things might work for them and helping them find those connections of what works in their community. So anyway, that's what we do the best, I think, is to be that connector. I just, I mean, I love introducing people to other folks and all that, letting them work it out. And then get out of the way. Support them as we need to, but let them do it.

**What's ahead for you?**

**MW:** (Durham) Mayor Pro Tem (and 2024 NCLM President) Mark Middleton (at the CityVision conference) said, "I'm a nerd." I just love digging into the policy of it all. And I look at other elected officials, I saw so many friends (at the conference). At our table, we were talking about all the issues and how much you learn—in both of my elected positions: city council and now state Senate. I learn something every day. And I learn something new all the time... And so, I think I would love to get back and help, at least share what I've got and connect people to information. ▣

**We don't know everything, we shouldn't know everything.** These are part-time jobs for goodness sake. Whether you work here or in your home community, these are part-time jobs. **The best thing we can do is to be that connector.**

» Sen. Mike Woodard, 22<sup>nd</sup> District, Durham County





# Property and Casualty Trust Updates

**ISABELLA MORMANDO**  
Communications Associate

In the upcoming 2024-2025 renewal year, the Risk Management Services Board of Trustees decided to raise the Property and Casualty Trust overall rate by 17.5%. This increase is due to various factors such as severe weather events, fires, high liability verdicts and rises in reinsurance costs, all of which have led to more claims. By increasing rates now, the aim is to offset the higher risk of losses, thus improving the financial stability of the Trust. Ideally, this will prevent the need for larger rate hikes down the road.

For many lines of commercial insurance, there has been a soft market since the early 2000s. Premiums have remained low despite a significant number of natural disasters globally. How long can commercial carriers continue to sustain losses at this level? In 2023, the market began to harden. Premiums started to rise due to construction costs, and availability to purchase certain types of coverage has decreased.

This is exactly how the early 1980s started, and what led to the creation of self-insurance pools for local governments all over the United States. Commercial carriers viewed public entities as high risk and low profits, so issued non-renewal notices to the point many local governments could not find insurance. If they were lucky enough to find a carrier, the premiums were too high for their budgets. State leagues stepped up to manage the self-insurance pools and, in most cases, have successfully continued to support and protect local governments in this way for more than 40 years.

The hardening of the commercial market affects local government self-funded pools because the pools must purchase insurance or "reinsurance" to protect the assets of the pool. Those rates have increased, due in part to global natural disasters as well as school shootings, terrorist attacks and expensive lawsuits. Those increased rates get passed along to the general pool rates in turn.

Fortunately, the Property and Casualty pool rate increase is relatively low compared to the expected insurance market increases for 2024. For self-funded pools to continue to be a viable option for local governments into the future, they must be run as a business—something you can continue to count on the League to do.

Here's a summary of the changes to expect:

**The 17.5% increase will be spread across several coverage types that have seen more frequent or severe losses:**

- Auto Liability
- Police Professional Liability
- Property
- Auto Physical Damage

To better align with market trends and feedback, and offer more expansive coverage with this rate increase, the Property & Casualty Trust has improved its coverage options this year. This includes clarifications, increased coverage limits and modernized protections, particularly related to law enforcement.

**Some notable enhancements are:**

- Clearer coverage terms for computer equipment under inland marine insurance
- Added rental reimbursements for property losses
- Coverage for employee tools
- Clarifications regarding losses from virtual currency or electronic payments
- Additional coverage for airbag resets, towing and labor, transportation expenses and glass repair deductibles waiver
- Increased coverage limits for various items like fire hydrants, newly constructed buildings, outdoor property and spoilage
- Updates to Police Professional coverage to reflect the latest policy language

For some members, the rate change for specific coverage might differ due to factors like changes in risk exposure and past loss history.

**Individual member renewal premiums may be higher or lower than the average 17.5% rate increase depending on the following factors:**

- Changes in risk exposure over the past year (adding or removing assets, changes in value, workforce size, etc.)
- For newly added exposures during the year, you were only charged for the period they were active; however, on renewal, you'll be charged for the entire year
- Past loss experience
- Any changes made to coverage limits or deductibles

"The upcoming rate changes can be of concern for members who had individual premium increases due to newly added exposures. This highlights the critical importance of incorporating proper risk management practices and controls to mitigate risk. Our NCLM risk control field staff are dedicated to working with members directly to address these concerns and are always accessible to assist with training, policies and a variety of best practices driven initiatives," said NCLM Director of Risk Control & Public Safety Risk Management Tom Anderson.

Please reach out to your regional field staff representative or contact Tom Anderson directly for assistance or more information on risk control tips and training. ■



# THE LEAGUE'S PODCAST IS BACK.



## THE LEAGUE'S VERY OWN PODCAST IS MARKING A RETURN, AND WITH A REFINED VISION FOR THE FUTURE.

Municipal Equation, the renowned podcast about cities and towns and the people who make them glow, initially kicked off in 2016 from the League's offices and cranked out nearly a hundred episodes on topics not limited to technology, public art, tourism, crime, funding, and even gaming, all in the contexts of municipal government or appreciating the cities and towns we live in and visit.

After revisions and tightening, Municipal Equation is back with new monthly episodes that intend to speak directly to League members -- an improvement of focus from the more general-audience approach of before, when the still-maturing medium of podcasting was steadily making its way onto people's computers and smartphones.

Now a staple of information-sharing, podcasts these days are a great way of zooming in on any topic and connecting with the very people that topic may concern. The revamped Municipal Equation, which began its new monthly rollout in April, will speak straight to North Carolina's municipal leaders and support staff about today's ideas, challenges and topics that bend the paradigm, like generative artificial intelligence or modern ways that cities and towns are developing comprehensive plans.

Your voice is an important part of Municipal Equation's relaunch; we want to include you. Is your municipality doing something a little different? Are you applying new technologies in interesting ways? Are you dealing with a verging

issue? Are you tackling old issues in new ways? What's happening in your area that might make for a good discussion on this podcast? Let us know. The sky is the limit when it comes to fascinating topics out of local government. Contact host Ben Brown at [bbrown@ncim.org](mailto:bbrown@ncim.org). The new episodes of Municipal Equation and the entire archive of past episodes are online at <https://municipalequation.libsyn.com/> or through your preferred podcast app.



# TJ Walker: Rocky Mount's Community Leader

**JACK CASSIDY**

Learning and Development Project Manager

**LEVERAGING BOTH HIS YOUTHFUL PERSPECTIVE AND A TRUE BELIEF IN CONNECTIONS, WALKER HAS BUILT MOMENTUM IN HIS HOMETOWN OF ROCKY MOUNT.**

Just about out of college and looking toward the future, TJ Walker visited his advisor and mentor at NC Central University and asked him a simple question: How best could he give back to his hometown of Rocky Mount?

The advisor gave Walker two ideas. Neither of them would be simple. One, he could get involved with a nonprofit organization. Two, he could get involved with local government.

"So, I did both," Walker said.

That decision—and the subsequent action—does well to define Walker, who has become an exciting new voice in North Carolina's local government. When he has the chance to make a difference, he does.

"It definitely hasn't been easy," Walker said. "It's been valuable though. I've seen an impact."

On the nonprofit side, he started WeFit Inc., which focuses on at-risk male youth in the community. In its fifth year, Walker says he has seen tremendous successes in supporting oft-overlooked members of the community. "These are kids that may not feel like they fit in anywhere," he said. "This program says you do fit in, and it provides them with those positive experiences."

On the government side, he didn't just attend some meetings—he ran for office and was elected at the age of 27, becoming the youngest elected official in the history of the City of Rocky Mount. Once in government, he didn't just sit back—he got involved with statewide organizations, such as joining the NC League of Municipalities' Board of Directors.

On both fronts, Walker proceeded through significant unknowns. He did not have experience on how the process would go, how he would be received, how the roles would actually work or how impactful he could actually be.

What he did know, however, was most important. He knew he wanted to serve.

"If you have a heart to serve, even without experience or without knowing what to do or what will happen, it'll take you far," Walker said. "You just need that heart to serve."

...

Walker's story is one of community. He has a deep dedication to the well-being of his hometown, Rocky Mount, where he was born and raised. It is where he lives with his wife and three children, and nearby he serves as pastor for First Baptist Church of Weldon. Walker left town only briefly, to earn his undergraduate at NC Central, but when he returned, he noticed that many people his



If you have a heart to serve, even without experience or without knowing what to do or what will happen, it'll take you far. **You just need that heart to serve.**

» TJ Walker, Board of Directors, NCLM

age did not come back. There seemed to be more people leaving Rocky Mount than arriving, especially the younger generations.

"For a city like Rocky Mount to grow, we had to try and engage our younger professionals," Walker said. "If they leave, how can we get them to come back? How can we bring their skills, talents and abilities back home?"

It's a question that similarly vexes towns across North Carolina. Walker didn't have the specific answer, but as a member of the younger generation himself, he knew that his involvement could only help. Simply by virtue of being a new, young voice in local government, he would provide an intangible asset of fresh perspective.

He used that asset through relationships. He leaned on family, friends and community groups during his first campaign, which allowed him to build his profile in town and win the election in 2019. Once in office, he continued that approach of networking.

Even beyond policy actual decision-making, it is through that networking that Walker believes he began building momentum in Rocky Mount.



**For a city like Rocky Mount to grow, we had to try and engage our younger professionals.** If they leave, how can we get them to come back? How can we bring their skills, talents and abilities back home?

» **TJ Walker**, Board of Directors, NCLM

"Things began to present themselves that hadn't been there before. Funding, other opportunities—we began to take advantage of that," Walker said. "Just being present, showing yourself as friendly and approachable, connecting and networking. That has made such a difference, both for the town and for the community members, who begin to believe in the opportunities themselves."

Walker has seen that approach take hold among fellow local leaders too, he said.

"We've seen the impact," he said. "To me, everything is relational. Relationships make the difference. Once you create those, it helps to progress the city."

Walker has also seen tangible results in his youth movement in Rocky Mount throughout his nearly five years in office. The local National Guard armory, which Walker noted sat vacant for more than a decade, is now a repurposed youth center run by the Boys and Girls Club. Aiming at his goal to retain young talent, Walker launched a young professionals network that engages community members just beginning their careers. There are also various

socials, community gatherings and financial literacy workshops, also overseen by Walker.

These developments are not separate from other city businesses, Walker points out. Rather, it is complementary, building support and momentum for critical policies and programs, which include neighborhood redevelopment efforts and economic development opportunities.

"Everyone's not going to agree with my philosophy or my style of leadership, but for the most part, I found a greater community that is supportive and engaged," said Walker. "You're not always going to see the fruit, but if you keep working and pushing, the fruit will reveal itself the way it is supposed to. You just have to do the work."

To fill any remaining time he has, Walker meets with each city ward and various neighborhood associations at least once a month. It's yet another example of leadership through action, of community over self and of a local leader walking the walk.

"It's hard," Walker said. "But it's worth it. It's working." ■





# Rave Reviews of CityVision 2024 in Winston-Salem

**ISABELLA MORMANDO**  
Communications Associate







**The NC League of Municipalities' most anticipated event, CityVision, took place in Winston-Salem this past April. To say this conference was a success is an understatement. CityVision 2024 saw sold-out, record-breaking attendance of over 600 municipal leaders gathering from across North Carolina. There was something special about this CityVision, and it was felt by participants and League staff the entire week.**

"In every possible way, the League delivered its best," said Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams about CityVision 2024.

This event has taken form as somewhere that city and town officials can feel at home. All around the Benton Convention Center, there was a friendly sense of unity.

Local leaders attended CityVision for a myriad of reasons, learning, networking and fellowship are among a few of them. But all come to CityVision with one common sense of purpose: to become better leaders for their communities. This purpose is embedded across each aspect of what the League provides at CityVision.

This year, the educational offerings covered a wide range of relevant topics. From generational differences to case studies in economic development, there was something for each person to learn, from all different sizes of cities and towns. With these educational offerings, the League provided Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) program credits. The AML program is a governance education program to help municipal officials gain the knowledge and skills needed to be effective leaders. Officials who attended the conference are well on their way to earning AML certifications that will be recognized and honored at CityVision 2025.

Among this year's special guests was the National League of Cities (NLC) CEO Clarence E. Anthony. Anthony highlighted the important work that local leaders are doing in their communities. He called attention to the need for leaders to pause and recognize the importance of what they do. From Anthony's perspective, working as CEO of the NLC, he knows that some of the hardest work really happens in the cities and towns across the United States.

The NLC is celebrating 100 years of strengthening cities this year. Anthony recognized the League's helpful role in this milestone by presenting (then) NCLM President William Harris and Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams with a poster to commemorate the moment.

As tradition, the League's new Board of Directors was sworn in at the President's Dinner. Durham Mayor Pro Tem Mark-Anthony Middleton was sworn in as the League's new president.

In his remarks, Middleton shared, "The North Carolina League of Municipalities is the most authoritative voice for our cities, towns and villages precisely

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CEO of the National League of Cities, Clarence Anthony









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because we focus on what local leaders always focus on—results. I will be a president that leverages relationships on both sides of the aisle to benefit the smallest hamlet to our most bustling city. The menu of services and benefits the League offers to our members is outstanding and I will be a brand ambassador for them from Dare to Cherokee.”

Additionally, Albemarle Mayor Pro Tem Marth Sue Hall and Clayton Mayor Jody McLeod were sworn in as first and second vice presidents, respectively. Fuquay-Varina Commissioner Williams Harris will serve as the immediate past president. (See ‘Middleton, Hall, and McLeod to Lead NC League’ article for more information.)

Finally, the Advancing Municipal Leaders awards were given out to standout partners of the League. The AML Partnership Award Winner was received by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality—Division of Water Infrastructure and the UNC School of Government.

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**CityVision 2024 would not have been so remarkable without the work of the wonderful host city, Winston-Salem. Mayor Allen Joines, the city’s council, the Benton Convention Center staff and Winston-Salem volunteers went above and beyond to provide comfort, entertainment and ease at this year’s conference.**







AML Award Recipient, NCDEQ



AML Award Recipient, Town of Edenton



AML Award Recipient, UNC School of Government



**The North Carolina League of Municipalities is the most authoritative voice for our cities, towns and villages precisely because we focus on what local leaders always focus on—results. I will be a president that leverages relationships on both sides of the aisle to benefit the smallest hamlet to our most bustling city. The menu of services and benefits the League offers to our members is outstanding and I will be a brand ambassador for them from Dare to Cherokee.**

» **Mark-Anthony Middleton, NCLM President**

continued from page 30

This partnership between the League and the NCDEQ led to the creation of the Utility Management Best Practices On-Demand course where NCLM and the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Division of Water Infrastructure staff worked together to develop and produce course content that helps municipal officials meet state requirements.

For many years, the NCLM and the School of Government have partnered in many areas, including the Essentials of Municipal Government course. As a result of that partnership, thousands of newly elected officials gained the foundational knowledge needed to start on the path to good governance and effective municipal leadership.

The Town of Edenton received the AML Learning Culture of the Year Award. Edenton has developed a culture of continuing education that permeates across all municipal departments. In 2023, they hosted the League for multiple trainings, and members of the Edenton town staff attended numerous other League courses. Additionally, they are working with the League to schedule further training in 2024. Their commitment to professional development has not just improved their own abilities, but has benefited the AML program as a whole.

CityVision 2024 would not have been so remarkable without the work of the wonderful host city, Winston-Salem. Mayor Allen Joiner, the city's council, the host city committee led by Winston-Salem Assistant City Manager Ben Rowe, the Benton Convention Center staff and Winston-Salem volunteers went above and beyond to provide comfort, entertainment and ease at this year's conference. From their exceptional social event "Bright Lights and Bites" to their numerous mobile tours exploring the city, there was no doubt their efforts are what made this year so special.

And finally, the League would like to thank all of its members who attended and contributed to CityVision. Your attendance alone is what makes CityVision a place of fellowship. Your participation in sessions as speakers, panelists and audience members is what makes CityVision a place of education. Your willingness to travel and devote time to us at CityVision is what makes you an impactful and effective leader.

Let's keep the good times rolling at CityVision in Greenville, North Carolina, April 29-May 1, 2025! ▣











# Town & State, On the Road

**SCOTT MOONEYHAM**

Director of Political Communication and Coordination

**FOR SEVERAL YEARS NOW, NCLM'S TOWN & STATE DINNER HELD IN RALEIGH HAS BEEN A ROUSING SUCCESS, BRINGING STATE LEGISLATORS AND MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS TOGETHER TO BREAK BREAD AND CONNECT ON ISSUES IMPORTANT TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES.**

In 2024, the event took on a new form. Actually, the event became many events.

The Town & State Dinner became "Town & State Dinner: From Jones St. to Main St.," with five regional dinners held across the state. The idea, in the year of the legislative short session (and with legislators not reconvening in Raleigh until late April), was to enable locally elected officials and state legislators to meet closer to home, better facilitating the ability of everyone to participate and to meet in a smaller, more collegial setting.

Based on the events, their attendance and the smiles seen each night, these five events seem to have exceeded every expectation, with all five sold out.

"The conversations here really show the importance of public service at all levels," said NCLM Immediate-Past President and Fuquay-Varina Town Commissioner William Harris, at the dinner held in Pinehurst.

In addition to Pinehurst, the other events were held in Concord, Winston-Salem, Hickory and Goldsboro. At each stop, Presidents Harris, NCLM First Vice President Mark-Anthony Middleton or Second Vice-President Martha Sue Hall joined with host city mayors in welcoming the guests and discussing the importance of the dialogue between municipal officials and state legislators.

Harris, after proudly showing off a photo of a tee shot that he had once put within four feet of the hole at Pinehurst No. 2, pointed out that at both the local and state levels, elected officials work to better their communities and the state as a whole.

House Minority Leader Robert Reives of Chatham County, picked up on that theme at the event in Pinehurst.

"You are on the ground," he said. "You help us make good decisions."

At the event in Concord, Senate Majority Leader Paul Newton of Cabarrus County

praised NCLM for its professionalism as an advocacy organization, noting how Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams and Director of Government Affairs Erin Wynia inform and educate legislators responsibly with the municipal take on important public policy issues.

While the focus was on relationship-building rather than policy, Newton did note that tough conversations will have to continue regarding how to address housing affordability.

Also, with remarks focusing on communication and occasionally touching on policy, House Rules Chairman Destin Hall of Lenoir spoke at the event in Hickory; Sen. Paul Lowe of Winston-Salem and Rep. Stephen Ross spoke at the dinner in Winston-Salem; and House Majority Leader John Bell addressed attendees in Goldsboro.

The most important remarks, though, were neither from the NCLM officer hosts, the host-city mayors welcoming guests or the legislative leaders. They came during the conversations between municipal officials and legislators, whether sharing the latest economic development in their community or common concerns and challenges.

Even as dinner and dessert had finished, the conversations continued as groups gathered near tables to make a last point, share a last thought.

Next year, as the legislative long session is held, NCLM expects to return to its single-event Town & State Dinner format held in Raleigh. Based on early returns from these regional dinners, some form of them may well become a staple for future short-session years.

NCLM would like to thank all of the host cities, their staffs and mayors—Concord Mayor Bill Dusch, Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines, Pinehurst Mayor Patrick Pizzella, Hickory Mayor Hank Guess and Goldsboro Mayor Charles Gaylor. ■





Rep. Garland Pierce



Town & State Dinner: Pinehurst

Rep. Howard Penny, Jr.



Minority Leader Robert Reives



Town & State Dinner: Concord

Sen. Paul Newton





Sen. Brad Overcash



Town & State Dinner: Concord



Sen. Natasha Marcus



Town & State Dinner: Winston-Salem



Rep. Vernetta Alston





Rep. Destin Hall





House Leader John Bell



Sen. Jim Perry and Mayor Don Hardy



Town & State Dinner: Goldsboro

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# Artificial Intelligence: Generating Questions for Municipal Governments

**BEN BROWN**

Communications and Multimedia Strategist

**F**or decades upon decades, humans have studied, romanticized, and maybe even hovered over the panic button when it comes to the concept of artificial intelligence, or AI, as a nebulous but certainly possible piece of our future. A best-case scenario, perhaps: AI helps us with our lives through organizing and applying knowledge, identifying informative patterns, automating tasks and maybe even inventing new technologies to benefit us further. A worst-case scenario, perhaps: AI backfires on us and drives mankind into a dystopia where tech fraudsters run wild before “conscious” computers seized all control, kind of like the *Terminator* movies or a Harlan Ellison story.

If we’re just talking possibilities, either scenario could be. What’s important for government officials and private sector leaders at various levels right now is learning how relevant this technology has become and what its capabilities are, because they’ve begun to bloom. That’s specifically true with “generative AI” programs, like ChatGPT, Midjourney and other search engines that can take user prompts and generate entirely new content—text narratives, images, videos, court filings, scientific analyses, all kinds of things—all on their own. This exists today, and it seems to be advancing by the moment.

“What’s new about generative AI, and that’s really what’s been exploding in the past couple of years ... is that this is a really different form of artificial intelligence,” said Kristi Nickodem, an AI expert and distinguished professor with the UNC School of Government, while presenting on the subject to a conference of municipal attorneys recently. Generative AI has been popular with some attorneys lately because it has helped with tasks including case research or the wording of sentences in filings. According to Nickodem, the technology itself has already passed the bar exam and scored highly or perfectly on several common standardized tests that humans take.

“It’s not just trained to perform a discreet task,” Nickodem continued of generative AI. “It’s trained on massive volumes of data—whether that data is written, text or images—and then trained to replicate or reproduce patterns in that data in a way that resembles human creative content. Sometimes that content is going to be text, sometimes it will be images, sometimes it will be video. But what’s new here is it’s generating brand new content.”

For anyone needing an intro, we can turn directly to this technology, like with the aforementioned ChatGPT generative-AI search engine, to which *Southern City* recently posed the question: *What are the pros and cons of using AI in municipal government?* Here’s what ChatGPT came back with:

## PROS

- **Efficiency:** AI can streamline processes and automate tasks, leading to increased efficiency in local government operations.
- **Cost savings:** By reducing the need for manual labor, AI can lead to cost savings for the government.



- **Improved decision-making:** AI can analyze data and provide insights that can help government officials make better decisions.
- **Enhanced citizen services:** AI can be used to improve citizen services by providing quick and accurate responses to inquiries and requests.
- **Increased transparency:** AI can help governments make data-driven decisions and increase transparency in decision-making processes.

## CONS

- **Job displacement:** The implementation of AI in local government may lead to job loss for some workers who perform tasks that can be automated.
- **Privacy concerns:** AI systems may collect and analyze large amounts of data, raising concerns about privacy and data security.
- **Bias and discrimination:** AI algorithms can inherit biases present in the data they are trained on, leading to discriminatory outcomes.
- **Lack of accountability:** AI systems may lack transparency in their decision-making processes, making it difficult to hold them accountable for errors or biases.
- **Resistance to change:** Some employees and citizens may be resistant to the adoption of AI in local government, leading to challenges in implementation.





That content took ChatGPT seconds to generate, even as aspects of it seem born of the subjective care of a human thought process.

Given the ramifications—and cases where generative AI got it wrong; Nickodem got a rise out of the attorney’s conference by pointing out times that AI-assisted court filings included fictional or otherwise bad content—municipalities have already done what might be commonplace before long, and that is to generate in-house policies on how that city hall or town hall should interact with AI.

In March, the magazine *Government Technology* examined where some local governments in North Carolina are with that effort. The Town of Chapel Hill, for one, has used generative AI to help rewrite documents and policies so they’re easier for the public to understand. The magazine also quoted City of Raleigh Chief Information Officer Mark Wittenburg as saying that it’s “important for us, especially as IT leaders, to really explore what the technology can do. And then be very mindful, again, about the community, the impacts to the community, and positive and negative impacts that it can potentially have.”

Nationally speaking, top tech cities, including Seattle, Washington, home of Amazon and close neighbor to Microsoft, are projecting excitement.

“Innovation is in Seattle’s DNA, and I see immense opportunity for our region to be an AI powerhouse thanks to our world-leading technology companies and research universities,” said Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell in a November 2023 press release about the issuance of policy for how city employees can use generative AI. “Now is the time to ensure this new tool is used for good, creating new opportunities and efficiencies rather than reinforcing existing biases or inequities.”

Seattle said its policy took six months of human work to shape. It plots the factors of responsible AI use in municipal government, including having a human employee review all AI-generated content before going live with it and limiting the use of personal data as source material for the technology.

“As a city, we have a responsibility to both embrace new technology that can improve our service while keeping a close eye on what matters—our communities and their data and privacy,” Harrell said.

Other jurisdictions have taken a different approach; the state of Maine, for one, in mid-2023 laid down a temporary but full ban on executive branch employees using generative AI in their work. The directive, from the state’s Office of the Chief Information Officer, points out that although there may be benefits with generative AI, “the expansive nature of this technology introduces a wide array of

security, privacy, algorithmic bias and trustworthiness risks into an already complex IT landscape. These systems lack transparency in their design, raising significant data privacy and security concerns. Their use often involves the intentional or inadvertent collection and/or dissemination of business or personal data. In addition, generative AI technologies are known to have concerning and exploitable security weaknesses, including the ability to generate credible-seeming misinformation, disseminate malware and execute sophisticated phishing techniques.”

Generative AI has made headlines recently for being able to clone people’s voices—taking a recording of someone, analyzing it sonically and generating entirely new sentences with a digitally concocted version of that voice—a pure, easy-to-fall-for fake created by a computer. The Federal Trade Commission is now working to crack down on people who use AI to impersonate government agencies or representatives.

The potential seems all over the place and, clearly, we haven’t reached a point of convention or uniformity in dealing with it.

That’s as the concept itself continues to change and evolve—and is far from new. It’s been a favorite subject of both science and pop culture for roughly 75 years or more. Early notions came from English computer scientist Alan Turing in his 1950 paper, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence.” The term “artificial intelligence” was coined in 1956, when computer scientist John McCarthy brought a group of top minds together to discuss the subject, deem it achievable and decide it was worth working toward. As computers developed in their abilities to process information, elements of that goal came into real view and got us to where we are today.

While the sci-fi writers might still see years of creative fuel in the subjects of a potential dystopia with AI gone wrong, or the ideal utopia of problem-solving technologies, government leaders are acting now to prevent runaway problems and harness the best opportunities. Email listservs are beginning to circulate draft policies. Information technology directors are eyeing the curve.

The national Council of State Governments, based in Kentucky, is one group compiling state-level actions on generative AI as legislatures begin to churn out bills on the subject.

“Be sure that you are staying educated on these developments,” said Nickodem. “The genie is kind of out of the bottle.”

For more with additional expert analysis from Nickodem, check out the related episode of *Municipal Equation*, the League’s monthly podcast, at <https://municipalequation.libsyn.com>. ▣



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**JACK CASSIDY**

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**There are few more important responsibilities.**



NCLM Municipal Accounting Services Senior Consultant, Perry James







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## **TAKING THE FIELD**

# **City Officials are Hungry for More**



**ROSE VAUGHN WILLIAMS**  
NCLM Executive Director

If there is one thing that always proves consistent about municipal officials in North Carolina each year, it is their desire to learn. To keep up with demand, we are offering even more topics of study through our Advancing Municipal Leaders program and our CityVision annual conference, and city officials are hungry for more. We were thrilled to see so many of you take advantage of the AML Certification Program credits offered at CityVision. This commitment to education is part of what gives our cities and towns something to be proud of.

We're proud of the new services we're able to provide. Our Municipal Accounting Services staff continues to expand the available services to members, not only including accounting software and cyber security but also one-on-one mentorship through the League's newly announced Accounting Instruction & Mentorship (AIM) program.

One of the things the League highly values is the one-on-one time our staff can provide to our members. It is in these one-on-one conversations that we can come to you, teach you and also learn from you about how the League can continue to better serve you.

We also greatly appreciate the time you have taken to come to us! This year, we hosted our annual CityVision conference in Winston-Salem from April 23-25. Each year following CityVision, I find myself with a renewed perspective on just what exactly it means to be a member of the North Carolina League of Municipalities.

It is in the gathering—in the occasions where our members, from every corner of the state, come together—that we can truly see NCLM as more than just the sum of its parts.

This was evident too throughout this year's Town and State Dinners! We debuted our "Town & State Dinner: From Jones St. to Main St." where League staff and members traveled to Concord, Winston-Salem, Pinehurst, Hickory and Goldsboro to host five regional Town & State dinners with legislators from their delegation in attendance. Each event provided a familiar feeling of camaraderie and invoked a collective sense of betterment for the state of North Carolina.

With the conference behind us and the summer ahead, I encourage you to participate in this membership as fully as you can. We are here to help. For educational needs, we will be offering courses and trainings across the state, and will soon announce a full schedule of offerings for the fall. For administrative support, we have an expansive team of municipal professionals ready to consult and assist. Legal consulting, police trainings and more, whatever you may need, the League is your one-stop shop.

Find and join a League affiliate group or groups that fit your needs. We will be assisting with affiliate group summer conferences around the state this summer. The opportunities to share with others who do what you do are going to be great.

I am so proud to be a part of this organization. I know I am lucky to be a part of it. It is my goal each day to make sure that you—our local leaders—feel the same. Thank you for all that you do, and I hope to see you around this summer! ■

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*\* After obtaining the Certificate of Dedication, officials must complete six hours of continuing education each year to maintain the certificate.*



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Contact us at [learning@nclm.org](mailto:learning@nclm.org) for more information





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