

SOUTHERN CITY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



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**LAURINBURG'S
LIFETIME
ADVOCATE:
COUNCIL MEMBER
MARY JO ADAMS**



SOUTHERN CITY

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

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WRITERS THIS ISSUE



BEN BROWN
Communications & Multimedia Strategist



JACK CASSIDY
Learning and Development Program Manager



STEPHANIE HUGHES
Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)



ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

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CityVision 2026 will be taking place in the capitol city,
Raleigh, N.C. We look forward to having you there.

SPEAKING OUT

Strength in Unity, Power in Participation



MARTHA SUE HALL
NCLM President

As I settle into this year as your League President, I've taken on a personal project that reflects both my commitment to our organization and my belief in the power of connection: I'm writing a letter to each of the 540 mayors who make up our League, or in some cases, making every effort to stop by town halls across the state throughout my travels. Why? Because I want to share what the League means to me, highlight the incredible resources available to you, and encourage even deeper engagement from all our members.

If your municipality isn't yet taking full advantage of the League's services, now is the perfect time to explore what's available. On the Members' Only section of our website, you'll find a "Member 360" report that shows exactly which programs your municipality is using. I guarantee there are more tools and services that could benefit your community. Reach out to your League contacts—they're here to help you make the most of your membership.

This year also brings challenges that remind us why our unity matters. Our colleagues in western North Carolina continue to face immense difficulties in the wake of Hurricane Helene. Like all of us, they worked to meet budget deadlines, but they were doing so while managing the aftermath of a devastating natural disaster. They need our support—and they need action from our state and federal partners.

In May, I joined fellow state league presidents in Washington, D.C. for the NLC's State League Fly-In, where we met with congressional staff working on the bipartisan FEMA Act of 2025. Reform is needed, but as always, the devil is in the details. I spoke up about the unique challenges our cities face—especially the

requirement to pass a balanced budget by the end of June, even when cash flow is disrupted by disaster recovery.

We were disappointed to learn on our way home from Washington, D.C. that FEMA denied our state's request for an extension of 100% cost reimbursement for debris removal. This decision adds to the burden our communities are already carrying. As leaders in Washington continue to discuss the future of FEMA and any reforms, it will be important that they hear what is needed most for North Carolina cities now and in the future.

In better news, before the General Assembly left town recently, they passed HB 1012 2025-26 Disaster Recovery Act of 2025 – Part II. This new law is the General Assembly's second tranche of monies designated to support those impacted by Hurricane Helene and was the result of months-long negotiations between the House and Senate. The bill appropriates an additional \$500 million to support various projects across the affected areas and received unanimous support in both chambers.

I urge you to get involved: share your relationships with policymakers with our Government Affairs team, actively read the weekly Legislative Bulletin email that comes to your inbox each Friday during the legislative session and attend events focused on policy and legislative planning. Your voice matters.

Since 1908, our League has stood on the principle that in unity, there is strength. For 117 years, we've embodied our motto of "Working as One. Advancing All." Let's continue that legacy—by staying informed, staying connected, and staying engaged. ■

I urge you to get involved: share your relationships with policymakers with our Government Affairs team, actively read the weekly Legislative Bulletin email that comes to your inbox each Friday during the legislative session and attend events focused on policy and legislative planning. **Your voice matters.**

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The Local Elected Leaders Academy (LELA) helps local elected officials develop a mutual understanding of how governing at the local level affects residents and differing constituencies.

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Courses are arranged into four recognition levels:



2025 UPCOMING COURSES

Practitioner level LELA 101

Essentials of Municipal Government 12 CREDITS

Dates and locations to follow the November 2025 election cycle

Top 10 primers Free interactive webinars

Public School Funding Process 2 CREDIT

September 3 Online

Gifts, Favors and Conflicts of Interest 2 CREDITS

November 11 Online

Rules of Procedure for Local Governing Boards 2 CREDITS

December 3 Online

Master level LELA 201

Effective Community Engagement: A Toolbox for Elected Officials 3 CREDITS

September 16
Chapel Hill

Top 10 primers Free interactive webinars

Local Government Liability 2 CREDITS

October 15 Online

Mentor level LELA 301

Affordable Housing Seminar 6 CREDITS

October 16 Chapel Hill

Strategic Planning: Linking Strategies to Results 6 CREDITS

October 22 Online

Development Finance Toolbox 6 CREDITS

December 2-4 Online

Program information: go.unc.edu/LELA

Course information: go.unc.edu/LELACalendar



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CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE:

AML Certificate Recipients

At CityVision in April, we proudly recognized the first-ever recipients of the Advanced Municipal Leadership (AML) certificates. This milestone celebration marked a new chapter in honoring municipal leaders committed to continuous learning and professional development. The following pages highlight all the individuals who achieved this significant accomplishment—congratulations to each of you for your dedication and leadership!

COMMIT TO CIVILITY CERTIFICATION

The following municipalities completed AML's Commit to Civility, requiring at least 75% board participation in the Commit to Civility workshop, personal pledge to uphold civility and the adoption of a Commit to Civility Resolution by the municipality's governing board. At CityVision, each municipality was formally recognized.



Town of Franklin



Town of Garner



Town of Henderson



Town of Huntersville



Town of Leland



City of Winston-Salem

CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL EXCELLENCE

The following individuals completed 25 hours of AML credit.



Chris Boyette, Goldsboro Council Member



Tami Walker, Henderson Council Member

CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL ACHIEVEMENT

The following individuals completed 12 hours of AML credit.



Ernest Mooring, Navassa Council Member



Heath Clay, Summerfield Council Member



Heather Smith, Knightdale Town Clerk



Jackie McKinnon-McLean, Raeford Council Member



Kia Anthony, Mayor of Spring Lake



Charles Reid Washam, Mayor Pro Tem of McAdenville



Letitia Goard, Mayodan Council Member



Michael Lewis, Franklin Council Member



Dalita Woods, Louisburg Council Member

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Stephanie Dollinger, Saint Pauls
Town Administrator



Terry Mann, Mayor of Whiteville



Phillip Stover, Louisburg Council Member



Leighanna Worley, Wilson's Mills
Town Administrator



Sona Cooper, Mayor Pro Tem of Spring Lake



Missy Melton, Cramerton Town Clerk



Angela Caraway, Mayor of Ansonville



Nancy Sandoval, Weldon Commissioner



Christina Cordon, Mayor of
Lewiston Woodville



Charles Rollins, Summerfield Town Manager



Pamela McBryde, Lincolnton
Finance Director



Robyn Chadwick, Spring Lake Commissioner



David Hunt, Ahoskie Council Member



Erin Hudson, Morrisville Strategic
Performance Manager



Ricky Hall, Graham Council Member

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Brenda Blanco, New Bern City Clerk



Dwight Lake, Mayor of Mayodan

CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL ACHIEVEMENT

The following individuals were awarded the Certificate of Municipal Achievement but were unable to attend CityVision to be recognized in person. We extend our congratulations to the following award recipients!

- Angela Bagley-Raynor, Martin County CFO
- Ashley Eure, Hertford Finance Director
- Barbara Jones, Cove City Commissioner
- Barrett Brown, Mount Gilead Administrator
- Bill Shanahan, Newport Manager
- Brenda Harris, Newport Council Member
- Carolyn Cole, Taylortown Town Manager
- Christina Cordon, Mayor of Lewiston Woodville
- Christopher McGee, Havelock City Manager
- Cindy Edwards, Jacksonville Council Member
- Debra McNeill, St Pauls Clerk
- Dottie Taylor, Bunn Town Clerk & Finance Officer
- Emma Brinson, Greenevers Town Clerk
- Foster Hughes, New Bern City Manager
- Franklin Gover, China Grove Town Manager
- Gerald Starnes, China Grove Council Member
- Jonathan Rorie, Spring Lake Town Manager
- Kathleen Patterson, Elon Town Clerk
- Kelly Lancaster, Upper Coastal Plain COG Finance Director
- Linda Williams, Erwin Finance Director
- Lisa Millington, Oriental Finance Officer
- Lydia Monette, Cove City Town Clerk
- Marcus Pretlow, Belhaven Town Clerk
- Maria Gaither, Shallotte Town Manager
- Matthew Johson, Jamestown Manager
- Nicole Branshaw, King Town Clerk
- Peter Franzese, Spencer Town Manager
- Rachel Dysartm Pinebluff Finance Officer
- Reagan Day, Ranlo Finance Director
- Rena Smith-Branch, Greensboro Business Process Analyst
- Richard Roedner, Elon Town Manager
- Sarah Spruill, Creedmoor Executive Assistant
- Sidney Gaddy, Mayor of Taylortown
- Snow Bowden, Mayor of Erwin
- Tara Nichols, Henderson Finance Director
- Tressa Rudd, Nashville Finance Director
- Tristan Thomas, Newport Council Member
- Veronica Roberson, Winterville Council Member

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Mary Jo Adams: Laurinburg's Lifetime Advocate

FROM HER UPBRINGING, THROUGH HER CAREER, AND NOW IN PUBLIC OFFICE, MARY JO ADAMS HAS SUCCESSFULLY DEDICATED HERSELF TO THE BETTERMENT OF HER HOMETOWN. AND THOSE EFFORTS ARE YIELDING RESULTS.

JACK CASSIDY

Learning and Development Program Manager

Mary Jo Adams seems to scarcely have a moment in the day that isn't dedicated to the betterment of the City of Laurinburg. There is, of course, the duties and responsibilities of public office, which she has held since 2011. But that role is simply the natural progression of a life spent focused on her hometown. The many local organizations, the volunteer opportunities, her career decisions – everything points to the furtherance of the community.

It's a devotion that started early in a household committed to giving back. Adams remembers working next to her father, handing out surplus food on Saturdays. With her mother, Lucile Bridgeman, a longtime health director and the first ever female county commissioner for Scotland County, Adams would volunteer alongside at the local health care clinic. When the time came to chart the course of her own life, she stayed public-minded and chose to major in social work and corrections at East Carolina University, then worked close to a decade as a juvenile court counselor. From there, she moved to education to continue working with Laurinburg's youth population first as a guidance counselor for Scotland County Schools, eventually moving her way up to assistant principal, principal and finally Dean of Students.

And that's just her career. At home, Adams was raising two sons—both Eagle Scouts—alongside her husband David, a substance abuse counselor focused on mental health. On top of it all, she served on the teen pregnancy prevention council, helped found Scots for Youth, a non-profit organization focused on at-risk youth in the community, and took part in countless other volunteer activities.

"I never thought of it as too much," Adams said. "It's just who I was and how I was raised. I grew up in a household where it was the natural progression to do things in your community, to give back, and to try to make your community a better place for everybody."

At no point did Adams sit on the sideline as Laurinburg developed, nor was there any point where she considered reducing her involvement. In fact, even as Adams' career responsibilities began to lessen, her interest in shaping the future of Laurinburg only grew. Shortly after her retirement, there happened to be an open seat on the Laurinburg City Council. Adams didn't hesitate. She ran, and she won.

"I joined public office, but my focus did not change," said Adams. "My responsibilities were different, but my goals were the same."



Mary Jo Adams insists that to know Laurinburg is to know her, and everyone in Laurinburg seems to know her.

On a walk through downtown, with Adams hosting Southern City for a tour, each small business owner was ready to meet her with a hello and a genuine desire to know how she's doing. There's the frame store, the tuxedo shop, the clothing boutique. At the antique store, the owner—a new resident of Laurinburg, recently moved from Ohio—was quick to share just how welcome she felt as a newcomer.

"It's not like this in other places," said Laurie Tocash, owner of Antiques, Arts and Oddities. "Council Member Adams and the whole council, they come by and ask how I'm doing, ask how they can help, and they really mean it. When they can help, they do. It's an incredible feeling of support here."

The tour through downtown is a tour through Adams' foremost success—a blossoming, alive city center. Laurinburg respects its

Laurinburg's past had an unwavering sense of home. It also had, as Adams sensed, a fading vibrancy—a pulse that had lessened since her upbringing. For years, this downtown run of stores and shops was quiet, and many of the born-and-bred residents had moved away.

My vision for Laurinburg is of a town that my children, and others' children, return to and want to live in..

» **Mary Jo Adams**, Council Member

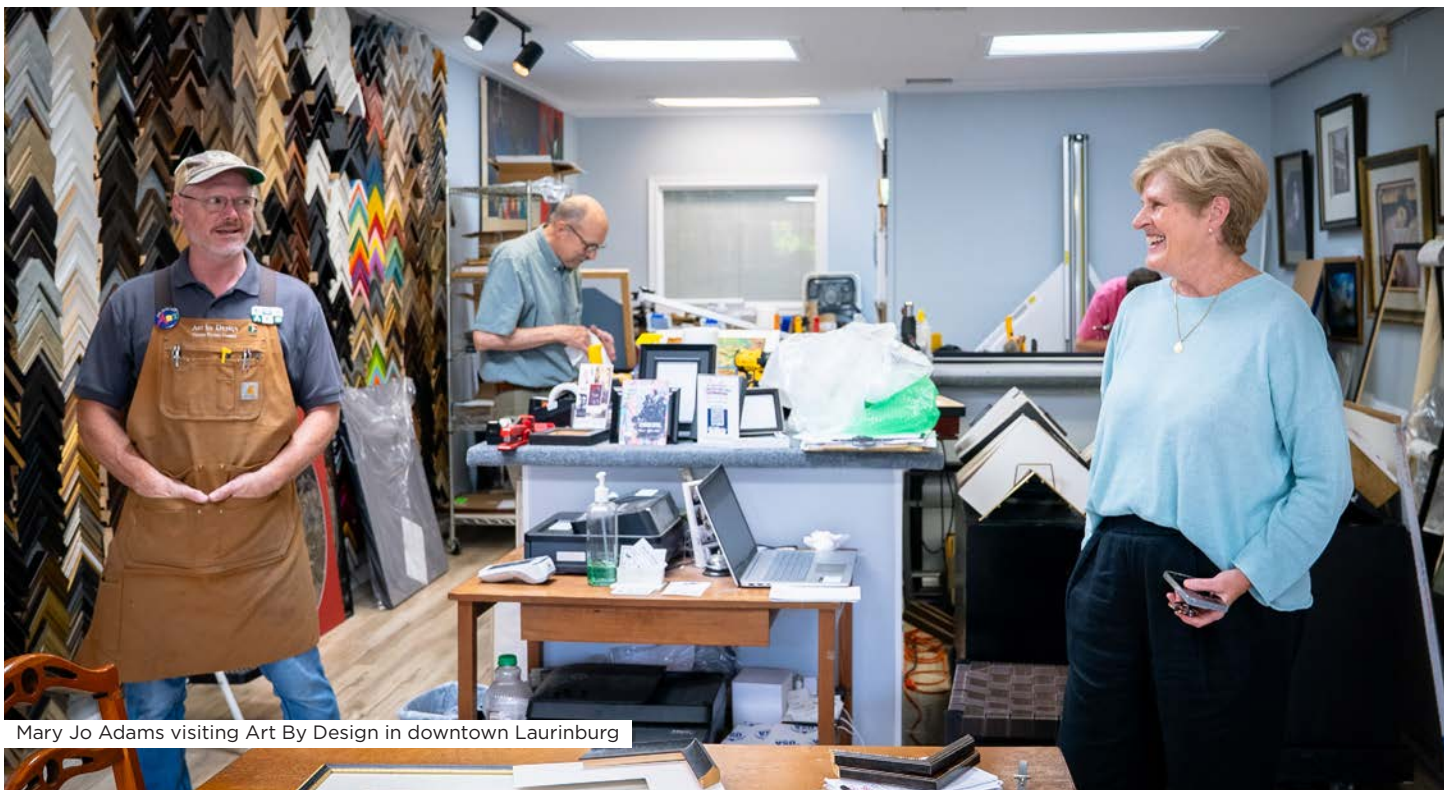
history, evident through both the preserved brick facades and the community relationships, clearly built and maintained over many years. Laurinburg's past had an unwavering sense of home. It also had, as Adams sensed, a fading vibrancy—a pulse that had lessened since her upbringing. For years, this downtown run of stores and shops was quiet, and many of the born-and-bred residents had moved away.

"My vision for Laurinburg is of a town that my children, and others' children, return to and want to live in," said Adams.

Laurinburg's present is far removed from that state of affairs. Adam's work is certainly to credit. Not only did each storefront either have a lively business or the prospect of one, but each member of our tour was a living example of her success. Mayor Jim Willis, City Manager Charles Nichols, Community Development Director Walker McCoy, and Laurinburg-Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Chris English, along with Adams herself, are all native residents of Laurinburg. Both of Adams children now make Laurinburg their home as well.

Laurinburg's future promises to be a bright continuation of its present success. In recent years, the city has brought in almost \$106 million in investment to the business corridor on the outer edge of the city, which aims to capture travelers on

continues on page 16



Mary Jo Adams visiting Art By Design in downtown Laurinburg



Adams has been **elected by her community four times** now, in both contested and uncontested races, and her level of involvement in nonprofits, committees and boards—including the NC League of Municipalities board of directors—seemingly grows each year.

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Highway 74 between Charlotte and Wilmington. Large, national chains have tuned into the opportunity of Laurinburg and have located franchises there. There are also the massive economic development investments happening at the Laurinburg-Maxton airport, overseen by the Southeast Regional Airport Authority, of which Adams is a longtime board member.

“Everything Mary Jo involves herself in, she succeeds, and the airport is a perfect example,” said Mayor Willis. “She is an incredible asset for this community.”

Even alongside the growth and successes around the city and county, Laurinburg’s downtown revitalization remains most representative of Adams and the council’s strategic successes. Put simply: they do not miss an opportunity.

For example, in several places throughout the city center, large, bright murals accent the historic brick buildings, with depictions of historic local figures and artistic takes on the city name and motto, “Deeply Rooted.” Several of these were painted by famed artist Max Dowdle, who had embarked on a project to paint murals across the counties of North Carolina. Laurinburg didn’t wait to see if they’d be selected — they went out, acquired grant funds, and ensured they’d be involved. They had the first mural of Dowdle’s tour.



Mural by Max Dowdle in downtown Laurinburg

“I love Laurinburg, it’s like my second home now,” Dowdle told the Laurinburg Exchange in 2024.

There is also the local holiday jubilee, ‘Tis the Season, which is more of a city takeover than a singular event. Run by a local nonprofit group, ‘Tis the Season turns Downtown Laurinburg into a holiday wonderland each winter, complete with festivals, markets, and thousands of lights lining the street. Upon its creation, Laurinburg didn’t simply let it run and hope for the best — they supported it with full city buy-in. As a result, it has grown into a flagship community event and an economic development windfall for the town each year.

“I’m not sure we’ve ever had a city council this aligned and this effective,” said Nichols. “Council Member Adams is a large part of that. She is prepared, she does her homework, and when an opportunity arises to better the town, she’s ready to jump on it.”

Adams has been elected by her community four times now, in both contested and uncontested races, and her level of involvement in nonprofits, committees and boards — including the NC League of Municipalities board of directors and the Lumber River Council of Government — seemingly grows each year. Each effort supports her community, her city and her region. To do so, as much as she can whenever she can, is simply her nature. And the results of her efforts are apparent.

“My goals are simply to make this a community people want to live in,” said Adams. “I think we’re making that happen.” ■



Mary Jo Adams, Southern City writer Jack Cassidy, Laurinburg Mayor Jim Willis with local store owner Laurie Tocash



Laurinburg-Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Chris English, Community Development Director Walker McCoy, City Manager Charles Nichols, Council Member Mary Jo Adams and Mayor Jim Willis (left to right)





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State & Local Leaders: Don't Eliminate FEMA, Improve It

BEN BROWN

Communications and Multimedia Strategist



Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo and Gov. Josh Stein urge against FEMA elimination, **stressing federal support is essential for hurricane recovery and long-term resilience.**

Bill Saffo has served more than two decades as mayor of Wilmington, the economically crucial city hosting a major seaport, popular industry, a university and roughly 125,000 people living their daily lives. The Atlantic Ocean is just a breeze away, making his community and its neighboring beach towns powerful magnets of tourism and an important venue for history back to the colonial 1700s. But with every year comes a certain kind of dread as weather scientists provide projections for the ocean's imposing, seasonal behavior. Wilmington has survived so many hurricanes and tropical formations just during Mayor Saffo's time in office alone that he and his counterparts were left stunned by the recent, serious conversations in Washington, D.C. about possibly ending the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a time-and-again vital partner in the city's recovery from disaster.

"I've lived it," said Mayor Saffo. "I've seen it. I know what the budget constraints can be. I know the devastation that these storms cause. There's just no way that the states and the local communities can do this on their own."

President Donald Trump and his team have long suggested shifts from or straight elimination of FEMA, whose website front-page (at the time of this writing) emphasized the importance of hurricane readiness. Floods, fires, tornadoes and other kinds of declared disasters are also in FEMA's purview, but President Trump said he views the agency as too flawed and slow to continue as we know it. In June, he said he was eyeing

a FEMA phase-out after this year's storm season to transfer responsibilities to the state level, which set off alarms for disaster-weathered leaders like Mayor Saffo and North Carolina Gov. Josh Stein, who've strongly advised otherwise.

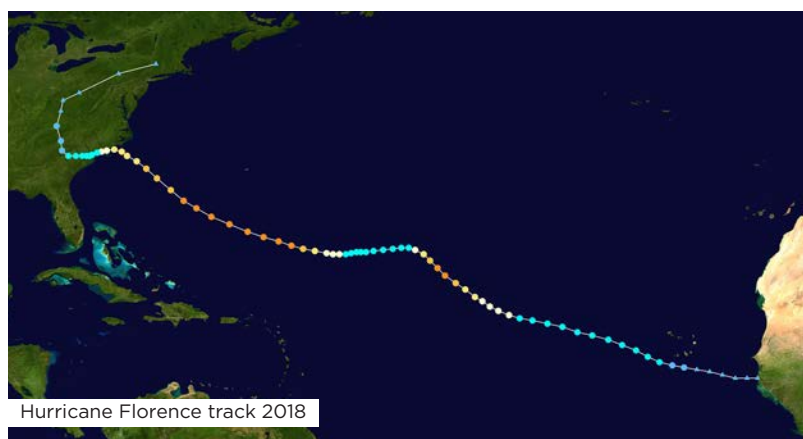
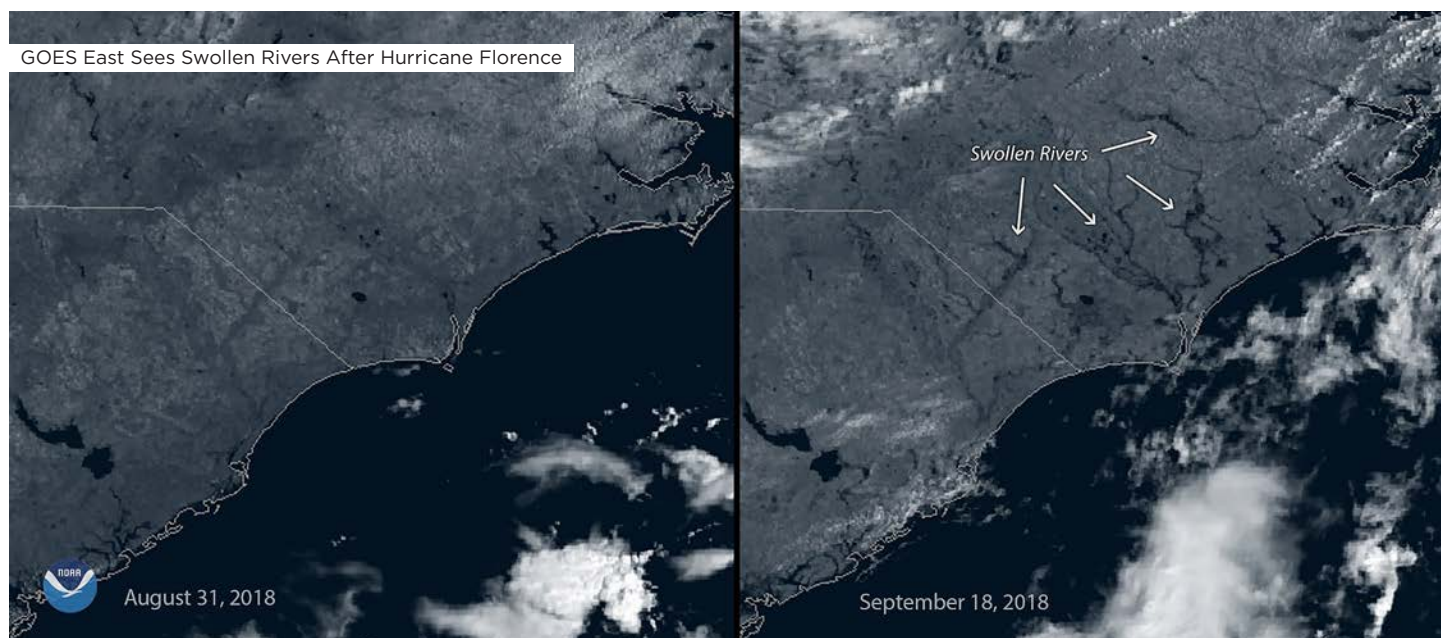
In a recent letter to the president's FEMA Review Council, Gov. Stein laid out how staggering numbers and loss of life can come from just one storm. "Most recently, Hurricane Helene devastated western North Carolina, killing 107 people and causing \$60 billion in damage, which is more than three times the cost of our previous most expensive storm. These weather events are getting bigger, wetter, and more damaging," Gov. Stein wrote. "We must have a dependable plan for response and recovery."

The governor acknowledged critics' impressions of FEMA—particularly with response dynamics and red tape—but insisted scrapping the agency isn't the way. "There is no doubt that FEMA could be better and faster. But let us improve it, not abolish it. As governor of a state vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding, and other extreme weather, I know we cannot afford for FEMA to be eliminated."

Mayor Saffo, too, sees areas for improvement, like with the speed of financial help when it's needed most, right after disaster strikes.

"I respect a genuine effort to look at what is most efficient and practical in terms of facilitating recovery," the Wilmington mayor said. "But I still will say that our local and state capabilities must be supplemented by access to federal resources. Without it, we're

continues on page 20





Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffro at 2025 Metro Mayors Coalition Conference

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not going to get on our feet as quickly, and it may take years for some of this recovery to take place.” He added that the city remains in the recovery stages from years-old storm damages, as the Atlantic promises more in the future, and that it’s hard to imagine localities or states without federal partnership and well-rehearsed intergovernmental response.

Gov. Stein’s letter outlined ways to improve FEMA, starting with quicker money distribution. He said the FEMA Review Council should, for one, consider recommending an initial, immediate tranche of funds for disaster-hit areas, instead of the post-disaster paperwork and processing that can take weeks or months to approve.

He also suggested the use of FEMA funds for permanent repairs, as the current system only allows them for rebuilding structures to temporary or pre-storm condition, which he noted can cost more than permanent solutions. “We should be able to use FEMA funds to finish the job in one effort, build back stronger, and save taxpayer money in the process....” wrote Gov. Stein, who also proposed streamlining processes for survivors. He said it makes most sense to keep what’s working at the federal level, and amend what isn’t, so each state doesn’t have the costly challenge of reinventing emergency management.

“Investing in resilience and future-proofing our communities just makes fiscal sense,” Gov. Stein told the review council. He cited a U.S. Chamber of Commerce report that found every dollar spent on resilience and disaster preparedness saves \$13 in aftermath costs.

Speaking just of Atlantic storms, North Carolina has a history of devastation from the coast to the mountains, a conversation far from limited to 2024’s record-setting Helene. For Wilmington, recent history includes 2018’s deadly Hurricane Florence, the state’s then-most expensive storm that put onuses on local government fund balances at the outset of recovery—an unsustainable, annual worry.

Viewing the fearsome trends of worsening annual storm seasons, officials argue that all levels of government need to remain seated together.

“If you lose one of the legs off that stool, it’s going to fall,” said Mayor Saffro. ■



Marine Units on Hurricane Florence search and rescue mission



There is no doubt that FEMA could be better and faster. **But let us improve it, not abolish it.** As governor of a state vulnerable to hurricanes, flooding, and other extreme weather, I know we cannot afford for FEMA to be eliminated.

» Governor Josh Stein



Hurricane Florence



Gov. Josh Stein



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The Strength of the Trusts Persists

ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

The League is happy to celebrate another strong, successful renewal season for the Property and Casualty Trust and the Workers' Compensation Trust. These insurance pools are administered by the League and its staff exclusively for local governments, helping cities and towns across North Carolina protect their employees, assets and financial health.

For decades, the Property and Casualty Trust and the Workers' Compensation Trust have been tailored to meet the unique risks and operational realities faced by North Carolina's municipalities. Instead of purchasing traditional commercial insurance, members of these pools join together to share risk, build financial strength and invest in the long-term safety and security of their communities.

Unlike many commercial insurers, the Property and Casualty Trust and the Workers' Compensation Trust are not driven by profit. They exist solely to serve local government. That means rate stability, responsive claims handling and a range of value-added services that commercial carriers often cannot match.

Drew Havens is a long-time town manager in North Carolina, having worked for the Town of River Bend, Town of Apex, and now the Town of Duck. He is no stranger to securing municipal insurance coverage. Prior frustrations with past carriers made Havens realize that a commercial carrier trying to represent multiple industries cannot understand the nuances of each one of those industries.

"No matter what a commercial carrier says about how they understand the business of local government, no one understands it better than the League, because that's all they do," said Havens.

The advantages of participating in the trusts go far beyond insurance policies. The trusts are member governed by a Board of Trustees comprised of municipal officials. Rates are driven by actual loss experiences of those in local government. This creates prudent fiscal management—not by the need to generate shareholder returns, but by helping all members practically. Over time, this results in more predictable and often lower costs.

The League's experienced claims team understands municipal operations and the unique exposures local governments face. This expertise helps resolve claims efficiently and fairly, minimizing disruption and uncertainty.

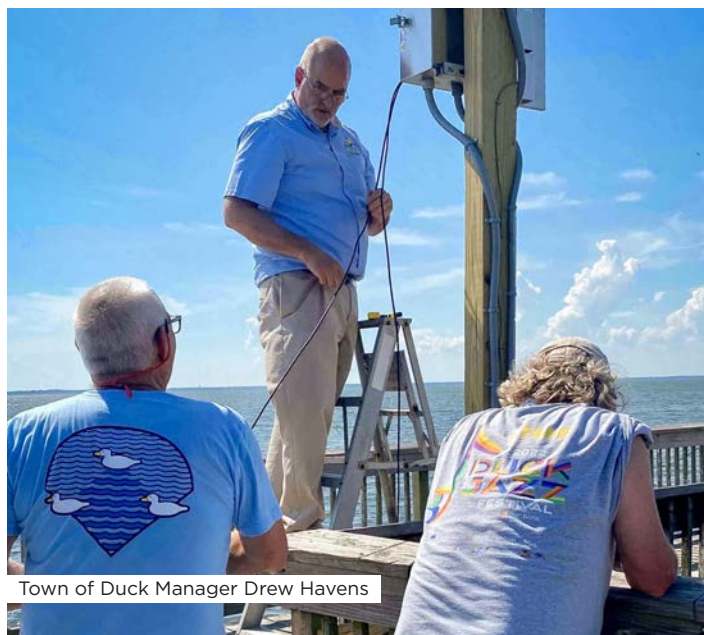
When Havens faced questions about the way claims were handled, he knew that he could call someone he trusted at the League to explain it.

"I've never had an issue come up because the folks don't understand the nature of the business," Havens said. "I know people there. I've worked with folks at the League for years. It's a comfortable relationship."

The League's Risk Management Services (RMS) team is comprised of local government operations experts. From public safety risk management to OSHA compliance consultants, the League's



Greg Lonnecker, NCLM Director of Claims



Town of Duck Manager Drew Havens

I've never had an issue come up because the folks don't understand the nature of the business, I know people there. I've worked with folks at the League for years. It's a comfortable relationship.

» **Drew Havens**, Duck Town Manager



NCLM Risk Management staff at local training

robust and knowledgeable RMS team is dedicated to helping our members reduce risk. Insurance pool members gain access to specialized safety and risk management resources. On-site trainings range from HR best practices to police pursuit driving safety, reviewing cybersecurity risk and other technical guidance. Our RMS team's proactive involvement helps members prevent accidents and avoid property losses before they occur.

This year's renewal process demonstrated the strength of the insurance pools and the loyalty of participating members. In a challenging insurance market where many carriers are raising premiums or reducing coverage, the Property and Casualty Trust and the Workers' Compensation Trust continue to offer stability and security for North Carolina's cities and towns.

"It's a huge benefit for us to be able to know the people [at the League] and to know someone is looking out for us in local government," said Havens.

For more information about the insurance trusts and to explore member benefits, visit www.nclm.org/insurance-risk-management. ▢





ALAN A. ANDREWS

The Brough Law Firm, PLLC is pleased to announce that Alan A. Andrews has joined our firm. A veteran, Mr. Andrews brings decades of experience working with some of North Carolina's largest local governments, both as general counsel and in areas such as policing, economic development, and land use.

Please contact us to see how The Brough Law Firm, PLLC can help your local government.



(919) 929-3905
broughlawfirm.com

Keeping It Local: Senator Kevin Corbin

BEN BROWN

Communications and Multimedia Strategist

Sen. Kevin Corbin is nearly 10 years into state-level service in the N.C. General Assembly, following his election to the House in 2016 and to the Senate in 2020, where he's worked with fellow lawmakers on all manner of topics, from perennial to developing to urgent. Coming from the Macon County seat of Franklin, in the state's "far west" tip, it's quite a haul to the Legislative Building in Raleigh—more than 300 miles, one way. But the distance and time away don't obscure his local roots at all, nor does his elected state role blur where it all began for him. Sen. Corbin is a local government guy at heart, having started out on the county school board when he was 22. He stayed on for 20 years, mostly as chairman, before moving to the county's board of commissioners, also later as chairman. He said he sees that experience as important to his legislative work and holds an appreciation of how it all comes together. Southern City caught up with Sen. Corbin recently at his home in Franklin (where he lives with his wife Beth and is happy to have his grown kids, Matt and Maggie, as close neighbors) to learn more about his motivation to serve.

...

Tell us about your district. What lights you up when people ask about home?

KC: Everybody will tell you I'm very proud of where I'm from. My district is pretty much everything west of Asheville. It's eight western counties (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain and Transylvania). It includes the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and it includes the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. I'm very proud of our mountain heritage. My family's from here. We settled in the Franklin area about 1830, and the property that I live on has always been owned by my family... Family heritage is a big thing. Western North Carolina, proud of where I'm from.

You've been in elected office for much of your adult life, since your early 20s. How did you enter that world?

KC: When I was at Appalachian State (University), up in Boone, I started to work for the newspaper, but I also got into the political scene up there. I ran for student senate, which is basically representing your dorm. I guess that was my first delve into politics, at age 18 or 19. Also was elected to something called the North Carolina Student Legislature. I represented App State at that. We went to Raleigh and we met and talked about issues pertinent to college students and otherwise. And so I kind of had that as a background. Plus, my father – he had never been, but he had been involved in politics when I was growing up. So, I'd kind of been around it. And then when I graduated from App State, I was 22 and I walked into a local drug store one day, and the guy that ran the drugstore, Larry Cloer, yelled at me and said, "Hey, why don't you run for the school board?" And he was on the school board. And so we kind of joked around a little bit about it, and I decided to do it and ran against an incumbent. Most folks, frankly, thought I couldn't win, so I figured I didn't have anything to lose

by running. So I ran, and won, and wound up serving five terms on the school board. I had no intention of serving that long. I had some interest and thought I might be interested in the legislature, but when I got on the school board, Macon County, my home county, had a real need for school improvement. The schools were old and they were not adequate size and all that. So I found myself chairman of the board at age 27. We did a long-range plan, like a 25-year plan. That plan included replacing or building new elementary schools, a new intermediate school and eventually a new high school. And so we started into that plan and frankly I stayed just because that was ongoing and I was a big believer in public education and getting those schools finished. So I wound up staying there 20 years, which was unprecedented... But then I wound up going from there to being a county commissioner. And from that perspective as a county commissioner, I was able to help continue that long-range building process for the schools as well. Actually, as we speak today, they're doing the last phase of that, which was building a new high school in Franklin. That's a long answer, but that's kind of where I was, my journey. Of course, after the county commissioner gig, that was 2016 and that's when I ran for the House and then ran for the Senate, and I'm now in my third term in the Senate.



KEVIN CORBIN
N.C. Senator

Having seen the operations of government and elected office at the local and state levels, respectively, what are your observations about productive intergovernmental work, communication, connections, and so on?

KC: Well, first of all, I would be very, very clear. I think the best, most efficient form of government is local government. I'm a big local government guy. I've often said it: I'm a displaced local government guy that just happens to be in the state Senate. I really believe in local government. I believe in local decisions. So I've got a lot of respect for folks that are willing to serve as mayors, town board members, aldermen, county commissioners, [and on] school boards. That's where the public has the most input. I find that in Raleigh, most folks back home, unless I communicate to them, which I try to do through media, social media, the newspaper or whatever, folks are a little disconnected with what goes on in Raleigh or Washington, but they're not disconnected with what goes on in their area, in their towns, because they see it, they're around it. So that's the best form of government, is local government. I'm really a big believer and in the decision-making ability, to be made by local government. So



Sen. Kevin Corbin at the Senate Bill 124 signing with Gov. Josh Stein.

As a matter of fact, **I have said more than once in my legislative career that before you become a legislator, I think you should serve in local government.** I know there's no way to mandate that, but I just think it's critical that before people get to Raleigh and try to work on the state level, that they understand how local government works.

» **Kevin Corbin**, North Carolina Senator

I've never been one that thinks that we need to dictate things from Raleigh. I know there's a place for state regulation for consistency, but I've been pretty consistent that I really don't believe in dictating from Raleigh or unfunded mandates and things like that. Having served in local government I think has given me a different perspective. As a matter of fact, I have said more than once in my legislative career that before you become a legislator, I think you should serve in local government. I know there's no way to mandate that, but I just think it's critical that before people get to Raleigh and try to work on the state level, that they understand how local government works.

Is there a way that you prefer to stay updated with local governments in your district? Do you see or take opportunities to get together with them and talk about matters?

KC: Yes, I'm pretty proactive in meeting with my folks. I speak pretty often with all my towns and counties. I guess I've got a reputation for meeting with and working with local folks. I've got a good working relationship with all of them, and they with me. My phone and my office are always open to them. I would encourage all municipalities to make communication with your legislator a regular thing. Don't just call them or go see them when you need something or want something, or you're looking for a grant. Have a year-round conversation. Not every day or every week, but I think really in life it's about relationships. And so developing those relationships, that's not just calling somebody when you need something. It's having a relationship that goes beyond that. You know who that person is, you know what the important things are to them. And it goes back the other

continues on page 26



Sen. Corbin at the League's 2024 Town & State Dinner in Hickory

continued from page 25

way – me having a good relationship with our town folks and county folks involves some fairly regular communication and conversations.... I really enjoy engaging with local government folks.

Looking back at the work you've done, with the essential communication and the time it can take to achieve certain things, what are you proud of?

KC: I would say early on, the long-range capital plan that we developed for Macon County Schools wound up being carried on for, you know, 30-plus years. All the projects that we did while I was there, and then they continued to build a couple schools after I left. So I'm very proud of that.... I would say Macon County has probably got some of the most modern and sufficient schools in the state. We had the vision to build a recreation park, and that was built while I was the county commissioner. That was one of the main projects that I worked on, had a vision for it. And that was completed in 2015 before I went to the legislature. And it's a large park; it has eight, baseball/softball fields, basketball courts, picnic areas, a boat ramp into the local creek there, walking trails. It is just an, all around great park. In the legislature, it's hard to say because you've worked on so many things. But this is current – (on July 1), Governor Josh Stein signed my Senate Bill 124, and that's a modernization of the state's hiring. I was the primary author of that. I worked with the State Employees Association of North Carolina and worked with the state employment office as well. We worked, really overall, about two years on that. And I think everybody's pretty excited about that. We've got 2,000 jobs in the state that are unfilled and, coming up, 25 percent of our state workforce is within five years of retirement. It's not the 1960s and '70s anymore, and we had really had not updated, or upgraded rather, our state hiring practices in many years. So this is a modernization of that. That was a big one. Of course, I wrote the Fairness in Women's Sports Act, which keeps men from playing in women's sports. That one was some controversy at the time, but about 90 percent of folks told me they believe that's the right thing to do. We were one of the first states to address it. I worked on Medicaid expansion. I was one of the ones in the Senate. At the time, I was health committee chair; I'm education chair now. But we worked on expanding Medicaid to about 600,000 new folks and I think that was pretty groundbreaking, too. We did it



Sen. Corbin with family supporting granddaughter Sadie, who won the District 5 (Western Regional) tournament.

without costing the state any money. It was good for the public, it was good for the providers. It was good for the people who got insurance that had not had it before. And a lot of people worked on that. That wasn't just my deal, but I helped lead the charge on that.

With all the time you've invested in your work, going back to your early 20s, how have you been able to break away and have moments to yourself? What do you enjoy outside of service?

KC: I love living in the Smoky Mountains. And I tell people there's two different worlds that I live in. One's the world in Raleigh when I've got to go out of town, doing the interviews and working on legislation, that kind of thing. When I come home, I try to unplug from that. I live on a farm. We have animals. We have goats, cattle, chickens, a donkey. And we really enjoy being on our farm and being outside. Love spending time with my kids and grandkids, and that's a really important thing to me. I really enjoy our legislative job. This is where I live and who I am, so again it's kind of two different worlds. When I'm down there, I'm away from this. I don't have this, I don't have my family. And frankly, the hardest part about it, the hardest part about being a legislator, for me, is I have the longest drive in the General Assembly. It's 313 miles, one way. I'm in my ninth and 10th year now. Fifth term. I have stayed in Raleigh two weekends in that time period. Two weekends.... And other than that, I come home and I'm very involved in my church here. I sing on the praise team and music team at church and I try not to miss that. And so, this is home. This is where my life is. ■

MUNICIPAL EQUATION

NCLM PODCAST TACKLES CYBERCRIME, TRANSPOR- TATION IDEAS, DISASTER RECOVERY & MORE

Municipal Equation, the League's long-running podcast about cities and towns in dynamic times, continues its monthly rhythm with a great slate for 2025.

Cybercrime, disaster recovery, use of American Rescue Plan dollars and new concepts in local transportation are a few of the conversation topics that host Ben Brown has discussed with knowledgeable guests in recent episodes, which you can find on your preferred podcast platform—Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeart and all the rest. Just type Municipal Equation into the search field.

Ever thought about making your city car optional? Maybe it sounds far-fetched, or just something that makes sense in the major urban centers, like New York City. But in Episode 89 of Municipal Equation, we learn that a North Carolina city is discussing it. GSO2040, the City of Greensboro's comprehensive plan that was being finalized at the time of this writing, includes a car-optional vision as one of the document's six "Big Ideas" in public demand.

Car-optional doesn't mean car-free, the city's transportation director, Hanna Cockburn, clarified on the podcast. It's more about options for everyone and the recognition that automobiles are far from passive in household budgets, she said.

"You know, for most households, owning a car is one of the most expensive things that you invest in, when you add up the car itself, the insurance for the car, maintenance, gasoline or charging infrastructure," Cockburn told Brown during the interview. "All of those things go together to make a really hefty financial commitment, so if we can take some of those burdens off of households, it allows households to have more flexibility to choose where they live and invest in other areas of interest, whether it be education, household needs, all of those kinds of things. It really is part of a larger idea of making Greensboro an affordable place to live."

Previously, in Episode 88, Brown talked with NCLM Cyber Security Advisor Erik Wells about the latest threats in the ever-evolving world of cybercrime and how to stay safe—not an insignificant task when it comes to government agencies and the sensitivities of their operations. They're frequent targets.

"The biggest concern is disruption to services, because, let's face it, our municipalities, their number-one job is to deliver services for their population," Wells told Brown on the show. "And if (criminals) disrupt their ability to do that, well, now we've impacted more than just the municipality. We've impacted systems and people and population, and that's really what gets elected officials fired up. If a city can't do their number-one job—deliver services—then we have a problem." Ransomware, a cyber-criminal technology that can lock people or agencies out of their own computer systems until a ransom is paid, remains one of the major threats, he added. The episode goes into detail about today's variety of risks and how to stay whole with know-how and access to trainings offered by the League.

Like all episodes of Municipal Equation, it's completely free to listen to and share with colleagues. Is there a topic you think would make for a good discussion on the show? An interesting municipal goal? A challenge on the horizon? A new public engagement idea? A creative solution to a common issue? The bottom line is learning and benefiting from one another's experiences. Send Brown your ideas in an email to bbrown@nclm.org. There are all kinds of subjects, both historic and emerging, worthy of discussion in the municipal sphere.

The podcast, also found at <https://municipalequation.libsyn.com>, will complete its 100th episode this year. ▣

LISTEN HERE:



RMS TRUST MATTERS CONFERENCE 2025

Join the League's insurance and risk management staff for a one-day conference that covers a range of liability and safety information attendees can take back to their cities and towns for use right away. From the beginning, the League's insurance pools have offered more than just insurance—we strive to provide our pool members the highest quality risk management education and safety training to keep municipal employees safe and help cities and towns limit their liability exposures and reduce claims.

**REGISTER USING QR CODE
OR THE URL BELOW:**

www.nclm.org/events-training/events-calendar/?query=rms



LEWISVILLE | OCTOBER 16



ADVANCING MUNICIPAL LEADERS

Professional development and education for municipal leaders, from the N.C. League of Municipalities.

FALL 2025 | COURSE INFORMATION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

A full catalog of in-person and online offerings all fall!

Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) is a member-driven education program designed to provide continuous learning opportunities and help local elected officials be successful in public office.

Through AML, municipal officials will learn how to meet - and exceed - the requirements of their role in office. Courses include a comprehensive overview of North Carolina municipal government and are presented by the League and our partners who are dedicated to the learning and development of municipal officials.

Our fall courses are designed for elected officials, supervisors, department heads and staff! There is education available for your entire team.

UPCOMING COURSES

September 2025

- HR 101: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Employee Management | Multiple Locations
- Municipal Supervisory Basics | Multiple Locations
- Excellence in Municipal Customer Service | Greenville
- Municipal Finance Webinar Series: Roles and Responsibilities | Online
- Economic Mobility: Resources, Toolkits and Best Practices to Elevate Your Communities | Online

October 2025

- Strategic Planning Workshop | Winston-Salem
- Cyber Security 101 | Online
- Excellence in Municipal Customer Service | Online

November 2025

- Budgeting Workshops | Multiple Locations
- HR 201: Performance Management | Multiple Locations

December 2025

- Council Academy: Basics of Elected Leadership | Multiple Locations
- Rules of Procedure: Legal and Procedural Basics for Municipal Governing Boards | Multiple Locations
- Commit to Civility | Online



Building A Firm Financial Future

THE AIM PROGRAM CELEBRATES ONE YEAR SUPPORTING NC TOWNS.

STEPHANIE HUGHES

Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)

THE LEAGUE'S ACCOUNTING INSTRUCTION & MENTORSHIP (AIM) PROGRAM RECENTLY MARKED ITS ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY, WITH THE FIRST COHORT OF 18 TOWNS COMPLETING THE YEARLONG TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP EXPERIENCE. DESIGNED TO SUPPORT SMALL TOWNS THAT OFTEN LACK ACCESS TO FINANCE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES, AIM PROVIDES HANDS-ON GUIDANCE, CATCH-UP SUPPORT, AND MONTHLY MENTORING TO HELP LOCAL STAFF BUILD SELF-RELIANCE AND ESTABLISH STRONG FINANCIAL PRACTICES. PARTICIPANTS SAY THE PROGRAM HAS GIVEN THEM THE KNOWLEDGE, SUPPORT, AND CONFIDENCE THEY NEED TO MANAGE THEIR TOWN'S FINANCES MORE EFFECTIVELY. WITH A NEW COHORT LAUNCHING IN SUMMER 2025, THE LEAGUE CONTINUES ITS COMMITMENT TO HELPING TOWNS SUCCEED FROM THE GROUND UP.

RECOGNIZING A NEED

One year ago, the League launched the Accounting Instruction & Mentorship program (AIM) through its Municipal Accounting Services department. The goal: to strengthen the financial health of municipalities that historically haven't had the resources or support needed to thrive.

The program works towards this end by providing towns with customized instruction on general accounting procedures that includes practical guidance and resources to keep finance departments on track. Additionally, catch-up bookkeeping and auditing support can be provided for towns that may be behind. Beyond simply supplying towns with resources and tools, AIM offers hands-on learning with a dedicated mentor, creating space for finance officers to ask questions tailored to their unique circumstances. The program is designed to start by helping towns get their finances up to date, but then to move beyond that by offering long-term solutions that position them for future success.

"The AIM program has been a positive experience for participating towns, not only helping get their financial operations up to date, but also providing valuable education, training, and tools staff can continue to use," Carla Obiol, League Chief ARP Officer, said.

In small towns, many finance officers are taking on this role for the first time and may not have received specialized training in government finance. Joel Killion, town administrator and CFO of Bailey, took on both roles two years before joining the AIM program. He described much of his early experience as on-the-job training, with little outside support.

"When you move into a new role ... you are always concerned with 'Am I giving this my best?' ... When I came into these roles, I didn't know who I could call, and I was having to figure a lot out on my own, Killion said. "When you're out on the front lines and in the trenches and you feel like you're alone, it's hard to do your job."



Joel Killion and NCLM Susan McCullen Bailey

Town staff are graduating from the program with a solid foundation of financial instruction, armed with the **knowledge and best practices to build towards the future.**

This gap in support is exactly what AIM was created to fill—offering assistance and training to help town staff start off on solid footing.

TAILORING THE EXPERIENCE

Launched in summer 2024, the program's first cohort of 18 towns is now completing its first year. Among those who joined the first cohort are Liberty, Bailey and Aurora.

Each town committed to a one-year program that would walk through an extensive accounting manual and provide hands-on training. League mentors met with towns at least once every month to walk through various topics and discuss best practices for financial tasks.

Kathy Bond, Liberty's finance officer, said she immediately saw the value in joining the AIM program. Most training courses, she noted, are geared toward larger towns and do not often address the specific situations experienced by small communities. Bond shared that one of the most valuable parts of the program for her was simply the ability to ask any questions she had and to have someone who was willing to help provide an answer.

"I didn't feel like I ever asked a stupid question. I felt like every question was validated and the response, if they did not know, they were finding out for me and getting that information back to me," Bond said. "That means a lot. It's nice to be able to have somebody that you can call."

In 2024, Aurora town clerk and finance officer Judi Lannon faced a tough situation. The town was short-staffed and had gone years without securing an auditor, falling behind on audits.

"I needed a lifeline," Lannon said. "My audits were late, and I was getting all kinds of inquiries. I was reaching out all over the place."

Knowing Aurora's situation, Lannon's contact with the League told her about the newly formed AIM program, offering it as an opportunity to get back to the basics of managing the town's finances.

"It's taken me as a clerk finance officer back to the elements of what I need to be focused on," Lannon said. "That had to happen in order for the Town of Aurora to move forward like it should and function like it should as a municipality."

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

After the first year of the program and the completion of all 12 chapters of the AIM accounting manual, the League is seeing meaningful progress from participating towns. Town staff are graduating from the program with a solid foundation of financial instruction, armed with the knowledge and best practices to build towards the future.

"The AIM program has been beneficial to our participants because for many of them, it's the first time someone has offered to help them one-on-one and in a sustained and personal way," Sharon Edmundson, League Director of Municipal Finance Programs and AIM mentor, said. "The tailored instruction and in-person visits have boosted their confidence and made them feel like someone in Raleigh cares about them. I believe we made progress in every town in which we worked."

Town staff have echoed this sentiment, sharing that the program



NCLM Charles Hines and Kathy Bond, Town of Liberty finance officer



Aurora Town Clerk Judi Lannon and NCLM Sharon Edmundson reviewing League finance resources

not only taught them what to do but also gave them the confidence to keep learning and growing in their positions.

"AIM has gotten me to a point where I'm much more comfortable, and a lot of that has to do with how they would explain things, how they would help with things, how they were patient enough to get you to where you understood," Bond said. "It's very encouraging and you don't feel alone—that's the main thing, is that I don't feel like I'm by myself in this."

"To know that I have someone I can call. Makes all the difference in the world," Killion said. "Going through [AIM] has allowed me to know what I'm doing well, what I can sharpen on, and as a result, each time we're done with our training, I feel a little bit more confident."

With a new cohort launching this summer, the League is committed to walking alongside town staff across the state, ensuring they have access to a wealth of financial knowledge, as well as the tools, training and support needed to succeed. ■

NCLM's Strategic Planning Workshop: Town's Gather, Create 5-Year Plan

JACK CASSIDY

Learning & Development Program Manager

IN 2024, NCLM LAUNCHED A NEW OFFERING, STRATEGIC PLANNING: A WORKSHOP FOR SMALL TOWNS. OVER TWO DAYS, REPRESENTATIVES FROM 14 MUNICIPALITIES GATHERED TO LEARN ABOUT THE FUNDAMENTALS AND IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING, AND THEN UNDERWENT A FACILITATED PROCESS TO DEVELOP A PLAN THEY COULD TAKE WITH THEM AND IMMEDIATELY IMPLEMENT.

LESS THAN ONE YEAR LATER, THERE ARE MULTIPLE MUNICIPAL STRATEGIC PLANS IN PLACE - DEVELOPED, REFINED, ENACTED, AND NOW MAKING A DIFFERENCE - DUE TO THAT WORKSHOP. ONE OF THOSE PLANS IS IN SPRING LAKE. AFTER DEVELOPING THE PLAN TEMPLATE AT THE WORKSHOP, SPRING LAKE'S ELECTED LEADERSHIP WAS QUICK AT WORK APPROVING THE PLAN AT AN UPCOMING COUNCIL MEETING.

Strategic Planning: A Workshop for Small Towns offers a practical, accessible solution for municipalities under 15,000 in population. Rather than just learning about strategic planning, participants will actively develop a 3-to-5-year strategic plan tailored to their town's unique needs and priorities.

Led by experienced League staff, this hands-on session walks municipal leadership teams through a structured planning process using a proven, user-friendly template. Participant teams identify key focus areas, define clear objectives, and outline actionable steps to move their communities forward.



AML Inaugural Small Town Strategic Planning Workshop Group

Unlike traditional trainings, this workshop delivers a tangible outcome: a working draft of the town's strategic plan, ready to be polished and passed. In addition, participants will gain guidance on governance best practices for monitoring progress and ensuring the plan remains an effective tool for achieving long-term goals.

"As the saying goes, a budget is much more than just a document - it's an expression of a town's values. It's the same for a strategic plan," said NCLM Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams. "By setting forth a well-informed vision for their communities, our cities and towns are showcasing their preparedness, fiscal responsibility, and a long-term approach to success."

The end of the two-day event, participant towns will have clearly defined strategic focus areas, objectives, and action steps, as well as the knowledge of how to use governance tools and performance tracking to ensure ongoing success.

"While we left the training with the outline of a strategic plan developed by those of us who attended, I also left with the

It's the best educational offering I've ever attended, said. **It's made an impact in our community.**

» **Kia Anthony**, Mayor of Spring Lake

needed information and materials so I can build a consensus of the entire board and gain everyone's input as we develop our strategic plan for our town," said Dan Ryan, Commissioner of Maysville. "I personally learned a great deal from this program and came back to Maysville ready to make good things happen for our small-town."

Most importantly, participant towns will learn how to make their strategic plan actionable- not just something that sits on the bookshelf at town hall.

"Strategic plans, when implemented effectively, change as community needs change. It's a living document," said Williams. "This workshop doesn't just prepare you a document. It teaches you how to make it work for your town." ■

FUTURE OFFERINGS

This workshop is now a staple of NCLM's training calendar, through the League's educational program Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML). Member municipalities will have the opportunity to attend this workshop each fall. AML is hosting an additional offering this spring.

- **Oct. 8-9, 2025 | Winston-Salem, NC**
- **Feb. 17-18, 2026 | New Bern, NC**

Each participating municipality must bring at least three representatives, two of which must be elected officials. (For example, a mayor and two council members; or two council members and a manager; etc.)

Financial support is available! Please visit the event page to learn more about scholarships your town can take advantage of.

FALL 2025 AML CALENDAR

Workshops take center stage this fall

This season's schedule features a dynamic mix of new advanced-level workshops and our popular fundamental courses in essential areas of municipal governance. From finance and employee management to the responsibilities of elected office, our core trainings will be offered at multiple locations across North Carolina, making it easy for municipal officials to access the



STRATEGIC PLANNING: A COMPREHENSIVE WORKSHOP

A unique and valuable opportunity for North Carolina small-to-medium towns. This NCLM workshop invites municipal governing boards to create a 3-to-5-year, forward-looking plan for their communities. League staff will review the benefits of a strategic plan for your town and then lead you through comprehensive exercises to develop your own plan. This exercise uses a League-developed template to assist each town select major strategic focus areas, objectives, and action items for a 3-to-5-year planning period.

At the end of the workshop, participants will have a preliminary strategic plan to take back to their towns for further refinement and approvals!

October 8 - 9 | Winston-Salem

February 17 - 18 | New Bern



Keep up to date on all new events at
nclm.org/AML,
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A Valued and Proud Service-Force: How Kannapolis Built Theirs

BEN BROWN

Communications and Multimedia Strategist

THE INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE THAT STREAMS THROUGH LOCAL GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IS ESSENTIAL TO THE CONTINUUM OF GREAT PUBLIC SERVICE. GOVERNMENT WORKERS WHO'VE ACCRUED CAREER EXPERIENCE AND WISDOM ARE ABLE TO ENRICH NEWER GENERATIONS OF EMPLOYEES. THAT IS, IF IT'S A WORKPLACE THAT LURES AND SUPPORTS EMPLOYEE LONGEVITY, WHICH MANY PUBLIC EMPLOYERS HAVE FOUND CHALLENGING.

While private-sector employers can lure quality job seekers with any manner of perks, governments and public resources are easy to scrutinize toward limitations, which can affect employees, their connections to the work they do, and efforts to fill vacancies. At the same time, what applicants are looking for in their employers is a moving target; these days, it isn't necessarily just about salary and health insurance.

"I think what's so important is employees recognize when you want them to stay and grow in the organization," said Heather James, the human resources director for the City of Kannapolis. More and more, municipalities are exercising steady efforts to understand and deliver what workers most appreciate now, with Kannapolis among them. Subsequently, Kannapolis's local government enjoys a remarkably low vacancy rate—hovering around two percent

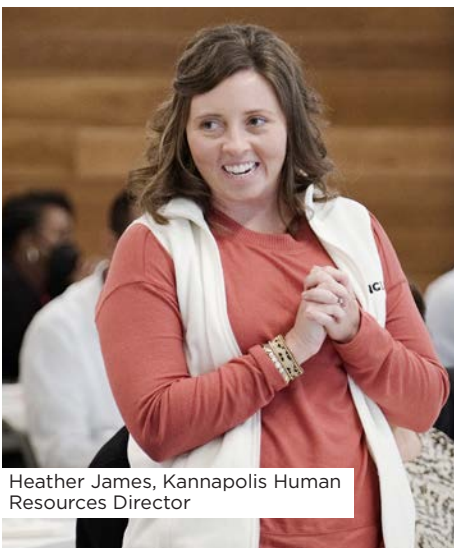
"I think, overall, recruitment and retention is really difficult for local government," said James, whose city has roughly 400 full-time employees and another 220 working part-time. Leaders there have been careful to preserve the marathon mentality, as opposed

to the sprint, to build the kind of work environment that does lure and keep talented workers, enriching that base of dependable, institutional knowledge.

"I think the key is having support from elected officials in funding initiatives to keep folks, and funding to keep pay competitive in the public sector market," James said. And though the word "funding" might fairly inspire scrutiny for frugality, what Kannapolis has seen suggests that it's cheaper and more efficient to fund a magnetic workplace than deal with the turnover slog.

Numbers from the City of Kannapolis show how they've covered the pay component, with, among other things, the creation of a "developmental pay" policy over 2020-2024 that enabled new hires and longevity employees to receive percentages each year following successful evaluations. This has helped build the city's compensation up to market levels.

Now meeting those levels, they've removed that policy, with its fixed-date annual reviews, to focus instead on a "pay



Heather James, Kannapolis Human Resources Director



NCLM Rose Vaughn Williams on Kannapolis panel discussion

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» **Heather James**, Human Resources Director for the City of Kannapolis

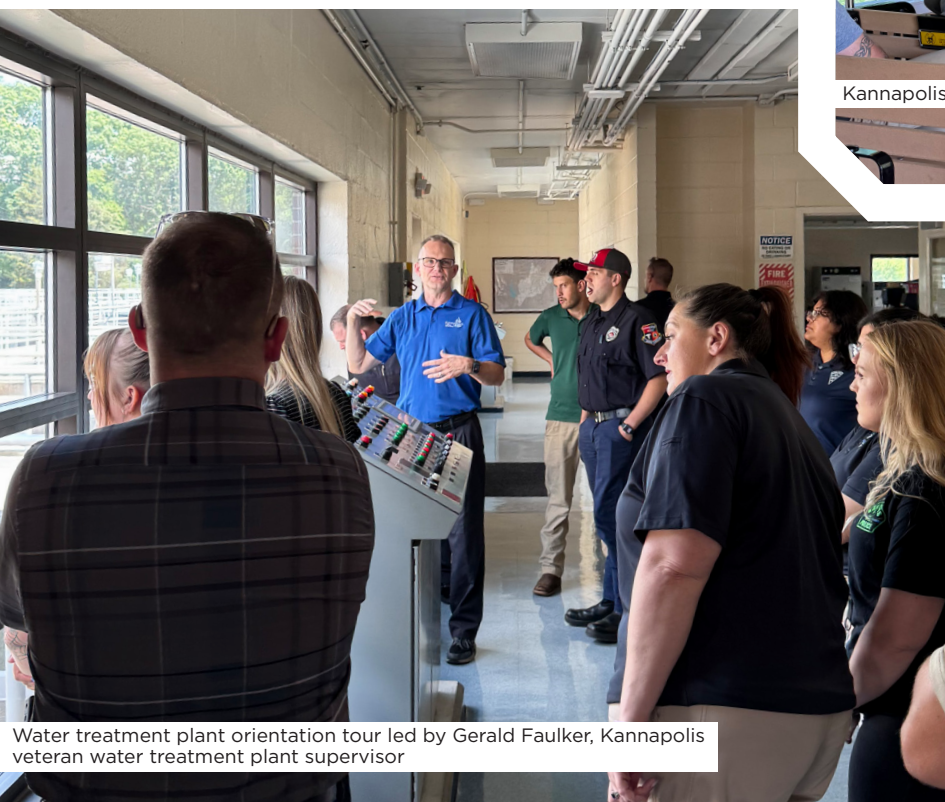
for performance” system. They’ve modernized training for supervisors and managers and have structured how they help their teams succeed today and grow into interesting careers. New-hire orientation isn’t just the old sit-down with bosses and immediate co-workers; Kannapolis has worked hard to make an event of fully welcoming people to the job with engaging first-impressions, including bus tours of the area and a well-produced video (hosted by City Manager Mike Legg, who notes he’s enjoyed his different roles with Kannapolis’ government since he began in the mid 1990s) that essentially thanks and expresses excitement for recruits regarding the valuable work ahead of them. Good performance is honored through in-person feedback and staff communications, like their employee-focused newsletter, which has a high open rate. City Hall and other local government sites (like police and fire stations) include modern gymnasiums, among other kinds of amenities in the government space (like sports and events facilities) that employees can access. They also express it together as for the greater good; James said Mayor Darrell Hinnant routinely praises employees for their “service,” elevating the feeling from colder “job” acknowledgements that can make people feel like they’re merely doing what’s expected.

James noted the power of elected officials’ backing in this. “If your elected officials are supportive of your employees, the employees feel like, ‘I can do this job, and I’m doing it for the greater good,’” she said. “I think it takes a special person to be called to public service.”

As the details are specific to Kannapolis, James during an interview about her city’s HR policies and values, was quick to recognize the diversity of resources that different governments of different sizes around North Carolina might have to offer. But she noted generally the scalability of efforts to show appreciation and reward, looking at recruitment holistically, beyond the elemental pay-and-insurance piece.

Ultimately, taking the time to learn about and keep an environment meant to maintain talent and knowledge in government —although the standards may move with time—is demonstrably worth it.

“It’s so much cheaper to fund the initiative on the front end than deal with the turnover on the back end,” she said. ▣



Water treatment plant orientation tour led by Gerald Faulker, Kannapolis veteran water treatment plant supervisor



Kannapolis orientation participants riding the Rotary Express in Village Park



Morgan Sloop, Police Accreditation Manager, at the Kannapolis orientation tour riding the carousel located at Village Park

TAKING THE FIELD

Building Trust Through Learning



ROSE VAUGHN WILLIAMS
NCLM Executive Director

There's a special energy that comes when municipal leaders gather—not only to share ideas, but to strengthen the bonds that make our cities and towns thrive. I was fortunate to see that spirit continues to thrive across recent affiliate member conferences and Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) trainings across North Carolina.

Whether you find yourself in large conference sessions or smaller workshops, it is inspiring to see the dedication each of you demonstrates. Finding the time and making the choice to step away from the day-to-day demands of public service to invest time in your own learning is not always easy. What makes North Carolina municipal leaders so impressive is that time and again, you show up—ready to sharpen your skills, deepen your understanding and ultimately grow the trust that your communities place in you. Not only do these gatherings provide practical information, but the conversations in the hallways and over meals are just as meaningful. These gatherings are opportunities to learn from one another's successes, share hard-learned lessons and find common purpose.

At every stop, I'm reminded that continued education is at the heart of good governance. From exploring best practices in disaster preparedness and municipal finance, to learning new strategies for community engagement and civility, you are proving that informed leadership is essential to gaining the trust of your communities.

At this year's CityVision conference, we were proud to recognize the recipients of our Advancing Municipal Leaders certificates. The individuals featured on pages 10-12, exemplify everything the AML program represents: a commitment to dedication and excellence in local government. As the world around us continues to change, so does the work

of local government. Your participation in AML courses ensures you are ready to serve your communities with confidence. Thank you to all our members who dedicate their time and place their trust in the League's AML program as a partner in professional development.

This commitment to knowledge and fellowship is what sets North Carolina's municipal leaders apart. It is what gives residents confidence that their local governments are prepared, accountable and working in their best interests.

As we move into the fall, our state marks the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Helene. I see firsthand the tireless work municipal officials and employees have shown in their communities in western North Carolina. I see how our great state has adapted to unpredictable circumstances with bravery and perseverance. Please continue to show your support for western North Carolina by visiting the towns that rely on tourism this fall season. VisitNC.com provides up-to-date information on travel suggestions.

Looking ahead, we have many more opportunities to keep gathering together. Check out our League events calendar for more info (scan the QR code on next page). From AML courses to risk management trainings, our events are designed to help you and your teams stay at the forefront of effective local governance. If you haven't yet explored AML's offerings, I encourage you to. From basics in municipal finance to the fundamentals of elected office, much of our core education can be utilized at your own convenience online or in person. ▣

At every stop, I'm reminded that **continued education is at the heart of good governance.**



WE HAVE MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO GATHER TOGETHER. CHECK OUT OUR LEAGUE EVENTS CALENDAR BY SCANNING THE QR CODE OR USE URL: WWW.NCLM.ORG/EVENTS-TRAINING/EVENTS-CALENDAR



Past and present League attorneys at this summer's recent NC Association of Municipal Attorneys

In Memoriam

The "In Memoriam" section of the NC League of Municipalities' *Southern City* magazine honors local government elected and appointed officials who have recently passed away. We believe it's important to celebrate their legacies and the impact they've had on local governance and civic life.



WILLIAM ROBERT MICHAEL "MIKE" ALLEN

December 20, 1949 – July 30, 2025

» Belville Mayor



BRUCE R. ECKARD

January 25, 1947– April 21, 2025

» Conover Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem and Councilman



SHIRLEY DIFFEE LOWDER

June 27, 1941 – May 23, 2025

» Former Albemarle Councilwoman



JAMES L. PURVIS, III (JIM)

October 27, 1949 – October 16, 2024

» Archer Lodge Councilman



WILLIAM DWIGHT SMITH

October 19, 1937 – June 7, 2025

» Former Norwood Mayor and Town Administrator



JANET S. WHITT

May 20, 1954 – July 19, 2024

» Danbury Mayor



FRED YATES

1936 – August 23, 2025

» Former Winfall Mayor

Entries on this page were by submission only at the time this publication went to press. If you wish to share the memory of a community leader or colleague, we invite you to submit your tribute through our QR code. Your submissions will help us ensure that their memories are cherished and remembered by all.



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ADVANCING MUNICIPAL LEADERS

Earn your certificate today!

Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) is a member-driven education program designed for local government elected officials and staff.

Our certificate program showcases your commitment to professional development and continuing education.

Learn how to begin your journey to an AML Certificate at nclm.org/aml.



ADVANCING MUNICIPAL LEADERS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Make the most of your professional development.

AML Certifications showcase your expertise in municipal leadership and commitment to professional development. Local leaders who earn any of the below recognitions will be honored at NCLM's annual conference, CityVision.

- **CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Requires 12 hours of AML credit

- **CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL EXCELLENCE**

Requires 25 hours of AML credit

- **CERTIFICATE OF MUNICIPAL DEDICATION**

Requires 40 hours of AML credit*

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



SPECIALIZED CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

AML also offers specialized certificates for municipal leaders who want to concentrate in certain areas.

Financial Management Certificate

Requires six hours of training in budgeting and finance as it relates to the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act. Completion of training for this certificate also meets requirements under G.S. 160A-148 for city managers.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity for Cities and Towns (DIRECT) Certificate

Requires six hours of training in the DIRECT curriculum.

Commit to Civility Certificate

A certificate for municipalities. Requires the completion of the Commit to Civility On-Demand course and a commitment to the civility pledge. Municipalities also adopt and submit a Resolution.

Contact us at learning@nclm.org for more information



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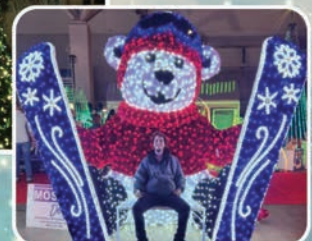
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