

SOUTHERN CITY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



Hurricane Helene

**THE POWER OF MUTUAL AID
IN WESTERN CAROLINA**

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SOUTHERN CITY

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Writers: Ben Brown, Stephanie Hughes, Scott Mooneyham, Isabella Mormando,

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WRITERS THIS ISSUE



BEN BROWN
Communications and
Multimedia Strategist



STEPHANIE HUGHES
Communications & Multimedia
Strategist (ARP)



SCOTT MOONEYHAM
Director of Political Communication
& Coordination



ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

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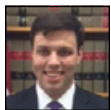
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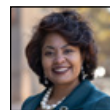
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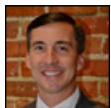
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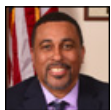
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SPEAKING OUT

Hard Work Lies Ahead, But So Does Success



MARK-ANTHONY MIDDLETON
NCLM President

There is little question that the road ahead for cities and towns in western North Carolina will be a difficult and long one. Recovery from the devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene will not be easy, and no one should pretend that it will be.

But as I have said in other communication since the storm, I have hope and confidence in our ability to recover. We have seen it before, in disasters like Hurricane Floyd and more recently Florence and Michael, that left eastern towns and cities reeling in the wake of flooding and destroyed infrastructure.

Our cities and towns, and their leaders, led the way to recovery in those storms and will lead the way again following this latest natural disaster. Already, I have seen countless images of municipal workers from across the state traveling to western North Carolina to help with search and rescue efforts, security and transportation, restoring power and water systems, and much, much more.

I am filled with pride to be a part of our collective network of cities and towns who, despite having strained resources of their own, are at the ready to help their neighbors now and into the future.

But again, this response was just the beginning. A lot of hard work is ahead. Repairing the infrastructure that serves and connects people, their homes and their businesses will take time and resources. Rebuilding homes and businesses, and providing the necessary economic support to individuals and business owners as that occurs, will likewise require focus and commitment, at all levels of government.

I earlier mentioned Hurricane Floyd, the storm that flooded major portions of eastern North Carolina in 1999. With large portions of towns and cities like Rocky Mount, Greenville, Tarboro and many others inundated with flood waters, it may provide the closest parallel to Hurricane Helene and the damage wrought in western North Carolina.

At that time, as the federal government poured in roughly \$2 billion in assistance helping repair people's lives, the state

responded with more than \$825 million to help fill the gaps not covered by the federal aid and private insurance. In today's dollars, that \$825 million equals \$1.5 billion.

That state assistance—in addition to providing for individual help in rebuilding homes, businesses and infrastructure—covered a range of needs that people only begin to contemplate after immediate needs are met. Yes, debris has to be removed, homes and businesses rebuilt, and roads and other infrastructure reworked. As that occurs, the economic losses that accrue—to individuals, businesses and our local governments in the form of lost sales and property taxes—will need to be mitigated.

That will be the case with this storm as well.

I am proud that this organization, the NC League of Municipalities, has already been busy responding to Hurricane Helene. The Risk Management Services Claims team has activated our CAT Response Plan and is at the ready to respond to members of the Property & Casualty Trust as coverage questions and claims start pouring in. Likewise, our field staffers have been in communication with affected members to determine needs and next steps. We have also been in communication with the State Emergency Management officials and offered our assistance with amplifying their important directives, updates and other information through our social media channels and on a Hurricane Helene landing page.

Our staff will be taking a key role in assisting towns and cities navigate FEMA requirements and other assistance programs. We have met with representatives of the governor's office, U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis' office and state legislators to discuss the needs and challenges. We will continue to do so and advocate on your behalf.

Again, the road will be long. But we've done it before. Working together cooperatively, across local, state and federal lines, we can do it again, restoring western North Carolina communities to the great places that they have always been. ■

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Connecting Communities

THE UPCOMING TOWN AND STATE DINNER

ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

REGISTER NOW FOR THE NC LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES 2025 TOWN AND STATE DINNER. THIS EVENT CONNECTS LOCAL LEADERS ACROSS THE STATE TO MEMBERS OF THE NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR AN EVENING OF LISTENING AND SHARING.

As the North Carolina League of Municipalities prepares for its sixth installment of Town and State Dinner, we are thrilled to invite municipal officials and members of the North Carolina General Assembly to an evening dedicated to building relationships and fostering collaboration. Scheduled for February 26, 2025, at the Marriott Raleigh City Center, this event is a crucial opportunity for municipal leaders and legislators to connect over dinner, exchange ideas, and deepen their understanding of the vital role each plays in enhancing our communities.

Earlier this year, the government affairs team took Town and State Dinner on the road, hosting five separate dinners throughout the state, divided up regionally. This took place during the legislative short session and was intended to maintain the relationships between elected officials and legislators.

As legislators prepare to reconvene in January 2025 for the legislative long session, Town and State Dinner will return to its original form, inviting all legislators and local officials to one dinner.

The League's Town and State Dinner aims to bridge the gap between local governments and state legislators. In an era where local issues often require state-level support, this event highlights the critical need for open lines of communication and mutual understanding. In doing so, not only can municipal officials express their cities and towns' needs, but legislators are also

provided the opportunity to voice their priorities and perspectives.

The relationships built and fostered at Town and State Dinner are key to advocating for the needs of our communities and ensuring that local voices are heard in the halls of the General Assembly.

The dinner will feature a program designed to encourage open dialogue between local leaders and legislators. Attendees will have the chance to discuss pressing issues, share success stories, and explore potential partnerships.

Participation in the Town and State Dinner is more than just an opportunity to network; it is a chance to advocate for your community. By attending, you can amplify the voices of your constituents and ensure that local issues remain a priority at the state level. Together, we can create a unified front that emphasizes the significance of local governance in shaping the future of North Carolina.

REGISTER NOW!

We encourage all municipal elected officials to register for the Town and State Dinner. Space is limited, so don't miss out on this invaluable opportunity to connect with your peers and engage with members of the General Assembly.

Join us at the 2025 Town & State Dinner! Registration is available at www.nclm.org. Registration is now open through mid-February. ▣



Sen. Phil Berger and NCLM President Mark-Anthony Middleton



NC Minority Leader of the House Robert Reives



NC Speaker of the House Destin Hall



Sen. Warren Daniel



TOWN & STATE DINNER 2025

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 26, 2025
RALEIGH

The North Carolina League of Municipalities invites you to the 7th Town and State Dinner, a gathering of lawmakers and local leaders. This event provides an opportunity for you, our municipal elected officials, to meet and build relationships with state legislators over dinner in downtown Raleigh.

Please join us as we celebrate our communities and the leadership that makes their successes possible.

After registering, please invite your legislators to join you!



Beech Mountain Saves Lives by Prioritizing Safety with Use of ARP Funds

STEPHANIE HUGHES

Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)

THE TOWN OF BEECH MOUNTAIN RECOGNIZED A CHALLENGE IN RESPONDING TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND TOOK INTENTIONAL STEPS TO BETTER SAFEGUARD THEIR COMMUNITY AND PROVIDE THOSE NEEDED SERVICES WITH THE HELP OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN FUNDS.



The Town of Beech Mountain in western North Carolina is unique in a number of ways: it sits at the top of a mountain, at approximately the same elevation as the Mile High City of Denver, CO, making it the highest incorporated entity east of the Mississippi River; town lines straddle two separate counties, Avery and Watauga; and while the town has a permanent population of approximately 680 people, that number swells to around 10,000 during the winter months as tourists flood to the ski resorts. But as town manager and fire chief Bob Pudney will tell you, what truly makes this mountain town special are the people.

"The people are the greatest asset that we have here. And then the woods and the mountains and the beauty," Pudney said. "But it is the people that drive the town and make it a nice place to be."

Because of the seasonal crowds, the town is also unique in its management as town leaders must provide services that are able to handle these crowds, while still operating on a small-town budget. One challenge that rose to the attention of town leaders was the need for better access to EMS professionals, especially near the top of the mountain. Pudney shared that there could be a substantial lag in these services arriving, particularly in poor weather. As the town dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, this need became even more apparent.

At the start of the pandemic, the town expected to suffer financially as they are a tourist destination; however, they found the opposite to be true as many people began working remotely and left the crowded cities for scenic retreats such as Beech Mountain. Combine this increase in population with the known challenge of reaching the top of the mountain, then add in the COVID-19 precautionary measures required by EMS professionals, and it became clear to town leaders there was a need for a better solution in handling emergent medical needs.

Around the same time these challenges were arising, the federal government passed the American Rescue Plan (ARP) which allocated funds to municipal governments across the country, with Beech Mountain receiving approximately \$103,000. Beech Mountain chose to use the funds for revenue replacement which opened operating capital for another project—bringing an EMS unit to the mountain.

The town previously had Avery County providing EMS ambulance transport to the town from the base of the mountain, which meant a substantial delay in getting those medical services to the top, especially if the weather was poor. So, the town invested their ARP dollars into bringing a full-time EMS unit to the town, with the funds predominantly going towards the building of living

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The people are the greatest asset that we have here. And then the woods and the mountains and the beauty. But it is the people that drive the town and make it a nice place to be.

» **Bob Pudney**, Beech Mountain Town Manager and Fire Chief



Beech Mountain's updated EMS unit



Beech Mountain provides a concrete example of how towns are investing ARP dollars in ways that are transforming their communities. The impact of so many lives saved cannot be quantified. **Town leaders want to showcase how they have prioritized the safety of their residents and visitors by leveraging the opportunities provided by the American Rescue Plan.**

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quarters at one of the town's fire stations. The town has now contracted with Watauga County to provide that full-time EMS unit and it is making a significant and tangible difference. Where previously, on a good day, it would take 20 minutes to respond and could take up to an hour in poor weather conditions, EMTs are now able to respond within minutes.

"The bottom line is it has actually saved measurable lives. We took \$103,000 of ARP money and turned that into lives saved," Pudney said. "There have been heart attacks, traumatic injuries, strokes that those people would not have survived in the old system because of the delay, particularly during the wintertime. ... So, for relatively few dollars we have saved dozens of lives with those dollars."

"Beech Mountain is in a unique situation because of its location," Regina Mathis, NC League of Municipalities' ARP field representative, said. "I think they were spot-on in choosing to set up an EMS station because it is literally a lifesaver for the residents and the tourists and visitors."

Beyond this direct impact from ARP funds, the town has joined with the League to provide another type of safety in the form of cybersecurity analysis and improvements. The League's cybersecurity team works with towns to ensure they are well equipped should they face any cybersecurity threats. Additionally,

the town has also received legal assistance through the League to aid in the development of policies and procedures that are required for the use of ARP funds and will also better equip the town to apply for state and federal funding grants in the future, furthering the reach of ARP dollars.

"We have a substantial amount of state and federal grant funding for infrastructure and getting those policies and all the issues put together—we would not have done it without [the League], quite frankly," Pudney said. "We use the League for all kinds of resources."

Beech Mountain provides a concrete example of how towns are investing ARP dollars in ways that are transforming their communities. The impact of so many lives saved cannot be quantified. Town leaders want to showcase how they have prioritized the safety of their residents and visitors by leveraging the opportunities provided by the American Rescue Plan.

"I would like people to know that coming to Beech Mountain is safer now because of these dollars. I am not certain that we would not have been able to do it, but this certainly made it much easier," Pudney said. "It is difficult to carve out \$103,000 in the town budget to do anything and so this was the opportunity that the elected officials took to make the community safer." ▣



Town Manager Bob Pudney (left) at recent construction project



EMT units contracted from Watauga County at Beech Mountain's Volunteer Fire Department



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At the Table: Rep. Gloristine Brown, a Former Mayor, Emphasizes Intergovernmental Connection

BEN BROWN

Communications & Multimedia Strategist

One could fairly describe the N.C. General Assembly as the high level of government for North Carolina. It's where the state's laws are born, including those that affect how local governments operate. But, like with local government, elected office there doesn't require any past experience with government service, which is only to say generally that elected officials at different levels of government can benefit greatly from good relationships and context-rich communication with one another. Rep. Gloristine Brown, who represents Pitt County's District 8 in the NC House, appreciates this as much as anyone, herself a former municipal board member and mayor of Bethel who remembers many occasions in which healthy relationships and dialogue with state lawmakers helped with positive outcomes. Now serving in the state legislature, she's keeping lines open with all kinds of stakeholders in order to vote with confidence and integrity toward a better North Carolina. Southern City recently visited Rep. Brown in her office at the Legislative Building in Raleigh, where she's encouraging local-level officials to stay familiar.

As we're speaking here today, you're poised to enter a second NC House term. How are things going for you?

GB: I feel good. It's been a little challenging because of the simple fact that, you know, being in the minority party and just being straightforward that there are a lot of things that you want to see done, but because you're in the minority, your chances are not good right now on getting bills passed. And I am the type of person that could work across the aisles if need be, and with anyone, but I'm going to support and think about my constituents when I'm making choices and decisions on how I vote for any bill.

Right, when you come to an issue that needs a vote, you might have people generally aligning one way or another on it, but you of course invest time into the context and effects for your people back home.

GB: When you get a bill that hits you, you reach out to the resources you have, and sometimes I will go to colleagues and talk with people back home, actually talking to constituents. I just go up to someone and say, "Look, what do you think about XYZ?" And they'll give me their thought, but I'm truly trying to think as a whole: this will affect my district and also the people of North Carolina.

How does that kind of mentality factor into your awareness of or sensitivities to needs in your district?

GB: My district is pretty rural. I have some areas in Greenville and over by East Carolina University and a little bit over by Winterville.



But to think about the small areas, the small towns that really have a hard time getting the resources that they need and the process that you have to go through just to get the funding or fundings that you need for your area, and how you're overlooked and how you really have to speak up. And then, I have never been one that, like the state, to send all these mandates without funding. I mean, in serving as mayor, we would get something that would come down from the state and it was like, "Okay, is there an appropriation with this?" And you've got to figure it out, you know, you've got to do this. And my thought is—and I've always said—one size does not fit all. And a lot of times when I notice that things are passed and the requirements that may work for the Charlottes and the Mecklenburgs, but you're going to give us the same instructions for a Bethel or a Farmville. It doesn't match. And so that is what causes a lot of our towns to miss out on what we probably could get if they (lawmakers sponsoring bills) would just change some of the wording or how the format is.

I just want to make sure that I'm doing the right thing. And I do realize that some things that I may make a decision on are things that not everybody's going to like. **But at the end of the day, I want to feel like that I've reached most of the people, that most of them are going to appreciate the decision that I have made.**

It makes sense, having prior experience in roles like mayor of a small town like Bethel, that you would see the sensitivities in things like unfunded mandates or language in bills that clearly wasn't intended for your context. How do you address that? Do you find other colleagues in the legislature with that experience too?

GB: Yes, I do, especially experienced ones. I go to people, the veterans up here, they are good and on both sides. And if it's something that I know that they can give me some insight on, and I have talked with them and they will tell me, "Okay, I think this might work," or, "No, that's something that you may need to wait on because right now that would be not a good idea." And I have no problem with that. And also, to make sure that I try to reach out if it's something that I think is going to affect one of my areas. I reach out to the county, I reach out to people to get their thoughts. I've talked to law enforcement to say, "What do you think about this? How do you feel about this? Give me some insight." And they have been a really big help to explain some of this stuff to me, from being on the local level versus being on the state level, where the playing field is a lot bigger for sure.

What was your experience like in moving from municipal elected office to state legislative?

GB: To be honest, it was a little scary, because, like I said, I thought I was dealing with a lot on the local level. But when I got

here, I was like, oh, this is the NFL now (laughter). You know, I left high school, I skipped college and came straight to the NFL. And I was like, oh God, my playbook is a whole lot heavier now. So, I definitely got to learn some things. So, it was scary, but, you know, I have to give it to the League. Because, with the League, we would always have our events (including the Town & State Dinners that pair municipal leaders with their General Assembly partners and other, past League events at the Legislative Building, like Town Hall Day) where we always interact with our legislators, and because of that, I was able to get to know some of the legislators here already. And so that was a little bit easier for me, because they had remembered me. So that actually helped me a lot.

That's so great to hear, that those experiences helped with your transition, getting into the NFL, so to speak. Because now, of course, you're dealing with myriad issues that may have local significance but also from different parts of the state as well as issues that are statewide in nature.

GB: Yeah, I'm seeing more into our environment, and education has gotten deeper than what I was looking at before. And so, just learning even more about how the monies are appropriated, the funds, and being on these different (legislative) committees and learning how the dollars are actually being appropriated to these

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Rep. Gloristine Brown at the 2024 Town & State Dinner in Goldsboro

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different organizations or to these different communities. It's just a big learning experience. And then understanding how the actual bill gets started, the process to actually get it to where it needs to be. On the (House) floor, when we came up for our orientation, we were taken through a mock session, even with the speaker (Rep. Tim Moore at the time of this writing) coming in with us. And it moves fast—you really have to listen and pay attention. And I do appreciate the way that we have our caucus; you go into caucus meetings right before you go on the floor for session, to go into and discuss the calendar for the day. And so, if there are any questions or any concerns or anything, those are times that you can ask the questions. But, at the same time, you still reach out to your resources outside to make sure that you kind of coincide. I pray a lot, too. I just want to make sure that I'm doing the right thing. And I do realize that some things that I may make a decision on are things that not everybody's going to like. But at the end of the day, I want to feel like that I've reached most of the people, that most of them are going to appreciate the decision that I have made.

Can you give us some more thoughts on that? On how you're obviously not going to be able to please every last stakeholder, but you are expected to have a voice or be a voice on the issue potentially, which might be especially sensitive. How do you deal with that?

GB: Right, people might say, "Well, I saw where you voted a certain way," and they may have feelings about it, and I've had to really try to explain to them why I made my decision. And it is no more than when I was in (local government). And there were things I did not support as a commissioner and there were times when I wouldn't vote for the budget. But I had to let people understand and know that there were things in the budget that I supported, but overall there were some things that were in there

that I just could not stamp my name on. And it's not that I'm not supporting this, this and this. It's just when it's all in one budget or proposal, when you have something that really stands out, that is what I'm voting against, not everything. So that is how I have to explain. And once I explain that to people and give them my view, usually they're okay. So, it helps people to know, it gives them context to understand how it really works. And that is what I look for. We may not see eye to eye. We are not all going to see eye to eye. But I just want you to know why I did what I did, and I can feel like I've done my job and made sure I didn't just do it because somebody told me to. The idea is good outcomes, as much as we can create them.

Do you enjoy the work in the House?

GB: I actually do. First of all, just the interacting with my colleagues. Because, like I said, I can get along with them, even on the other side. I have been asked to do the prayer twice on the floor and did that. I love seeing when we can come together on various fields. Some we won't, but when we've done something that I know that's going to help people, that makes me feel good.

What advice would you give to colleagues at the local government level in being effective with their legislators, the General Assembly overall, having good communication between local and state governments, and so on?

GB: First of all, for me, it was getting involved, more involved, in ways that put me in places where I could reach my legislators. I think you need to visit your legislators. I never thought that I would be in this position (in the House) this soon. I have thought about it, but at one point I thought, "Wow, that's probably somewhere I would never be." And then it happened. So, I think on the local level, if you're serious about your position as being an elected official and want to help your community as well as



Rep. Brown when she was a NCLM board member connecting with her town's NCGA representative



Rep. Brown working in her legislative office



Just continue to stay involved. Continue to talk. Continue to be at the table by any means. **It's time for us as local elected officials to stop being on the menu and it's time for us to be at the table.**

the state, get more involved. (While serving as mayor) I knew my legislators and I had their direct contact. I was able to call. I would visit, and when I came to Raleigh, I did not just visit my legislators; I would pop in and just introduce myself. Because, at some point in time, they will remember you.

So, develop a good rhythm of contact that shows you're the kind of official who's there, appreciates the hard work, and keeps local government at the table.

GB: Just continue to stay involved. Continue to talk. Continue to be at the table by any means. It's time for us as local elected officials to stop being on the menu and it's time for us to be at the table. One of the biggest, greatest things that I said that I feel good about when I left as mayor, is the town commission and the town manager, we were able to get that deal with Greenville Utilities to come in and take over our water and sewer. Because that was a struggle for us. Being a small town with a very small tax base. And they kept saying that we were not charging enough and what else can you do? You can't keep getting loans, and if your town is not growing, who's going to pay it? So, I think being involved and realizing that we had to be at the table in order for that to happen. And when we were at the table, it happened. So, I encourage my colleagues, my friends that are serving on the local level, to really get more involved with your legislators and your neighbors, and other legislators. I mean, let people know what's going on. Because you have a lot of people that may be in this position (in the legislature) that have never served in government before. So, you can't expect them to know what's going on in your town or in your city if you don't tell them. They need to hear from you. And if they prefer me not to be a part in order to get something from my district, I have no problem backing away, as long as I know it will happen. That's me. I'm just here to do the work and to keep learning and to be proud of my district, my town, my county and my state. ■

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Foundation of Collaboration

JACKSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL'S BRIAN JACKSON DRAWS FROM CONNECTED, NEIGHBORHOOD SPIRIT

BEN BROWN

Communications and Multimedia Strategist

Flat out, one of the most encouraging and hopeful features of local government is its closeness to the people and opportunities to directly partner with constituents for the kinds of better tomorrows that fit with the community's contexts and values. Take any issue—affordable housing, public health, youth expression, common hardship recoveries—and you can find municipal officials listening to and working with fellow community voices on shared visions of brighter futures. It's certainly true for all levels of government, but it's a chorus for local-level officials (staff and elected alike) when asked what motivates their service to their respective municipalities.

In the eastern North Carolina city of Jacksonville, for one, is an elected councilman who credits his style of service and communication to the neighborhood-level spirit he grew up with there. People bonded to solve problems and appreciated the outcomes they shared in, and can still find light in those opportunities, said Brian Jackson, who since 2017 has represented Jacksonville's Ward 1 on the city council.

"I grew up here," said Jackson, who additionally serves on the NC League of Municipalities Board of Directors, during a recent interview with *Southern City* about his experiences and takeaways. "I feel more connected to home working in municipal government."

But those experiences also included tenures away from his home city that helped broaden his perspective—not only in what it means to work together, but also in why the maintenance of it is so important.

"When you have those bodies already working together, in closer association, then it's easier to find the resources, despite it being difficult, because things are tighter," Jackson told *Southern City*. "But the opportunity to find the resources is a greater when working network of established partners."

Today, he sees his native Jacksonville—home to roughly 73,000 people as of the 2020 census and generally known by outsiders as home to the expansive U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune—as a land of opportunity and enjoyment for all kinds of people, who can partake and feel empowered in a community growing with options beyond its reputation as a military town, even as Jackson underlines the base's vitality to the entire region.

The Jacksonville he remembers from his youth centers on Bell Fork Homes, a historically Black, planned neighborhood, built during segregation to house some of the first Black Marine families as well as civilian families during segregation. These worlds couldn't help but mesh in all ways. "Back when I was growing up, you really didn't know where church, family and community stopped or started," said Jackson, himself a descendant of those who in the 1850s started which is Jacksonville's earliest Black church, Sandy Run Missionary Baptist Church. The church became the underpinning of the community, serving native and military families (many that were the families of the Marines of Jacksonville's Montford Point, where the Marine Corps' first Black recruits trained).



"That is my foundation," Jackson said. "We all worked together."

That connection didn't leave Jackson as he ventured out in the world, even as he figured for a time that his journey might not circle back to Jacksonville. "You always think everything else is better than home," he said of his younger days looking outward at the world's opportunities. After graduating high school in the mid-1980s, Jackson left for Greensboro to attend college at NC A&T State University before he entered the U.S. Navy, which eventually led to serving in the Persian Gulf onboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

Jackson served four and half years in the Navy as an electronics technician working on radar systems before he returned to the U.S. and eventually joined the cause of veterans' advocacy, working with Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and connecting

He sees his native Jacksonville—home to roughly 73,000 people as of the 2020 census and generally known by outsiders as home to the expansive U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune—**as a land of opportunity and enjoyment for all kinds of people, who can partake and feel empowered in a community growing with options beyond its reputation as a military town**, even as Jackson underlines the base’s vitality to the entire region.

veterans and transitioning service members with resources. He spent 10 years as an employee doing this work. His advocacy began in Washington DC in positions that included VFW Liaison to the National Guard Bureau and employment with a television network on Capitol Hill, before he steered his advocacy back to North Carolina. He relocated to Camp Lejeune to serve as a pre-discharge representative for the VFW. Serving area military personnel transitioning back to civilian life, processing VA Claims. The task primarily at this time was serving service members returning from Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

“I just thought, coming back, that it was up to me,” said Jackson, back in Jacksonville and at this point professionally experienced in scenarios that involved big needs, finite resources, knowledge

of the government process and steady advocacy for good outcomes. The value placed on collaboration and partnership grew and grew as he continued the work.

But he saw himself as a “behind-the-scenes” person, working more quietly with the community on the personal level. These things aren’t mutually exclusive, though—Jackson recalled the late Congressman Walter Jones and certain aspects of his work that he saw as empathetic and motivating.

Jones, whose Congressional District 3 included Jacksonville, would personally write letters to the families of military

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During *Southern City's* interview with Jackson, he noted numerous other partnerships and city-supported initiatives to make meaningful strides in areas like housing, re-entry, substance abuse, family crises, and more.

Jackson said he also values expression through the arts and a healthy arts scene; beyond it being a feelgood feature of human nature, art has proven to be a crucial piece of therapy and wellbeing (especially for a population that includes individuals living with traumas from military experience).

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members who died in the line of duty, Jackson explained, noting conversations he had with Jones about that very human side of elected service. "It was really a continuation of the idea of service to people," said Jackson. "That really broadened my scope of, 'Okay, now what can I do?'"

In 2017, Jackson was elected to the Jacksonville City Council. Then and today, he's said his focus has remained on the community and its people: "It's definitely not a me-thing at all. It's a we-thing."

He is proud of what he has seen accomplished over his years on the council, with the principles of collaboration and togetherness bold as ever and delivering results the people need. (Connecting points, Jackson noted that one of the programs he grew familiar with at the VFW was properly called "Unmet Needs.") In

Jacksonville, in reference to its Marine base, Jackson has heard young people say among other things that there haven't been enough outlets or enjoyable activities locally, but it's growing and offering more all the time, even now with its own baseball team in the Old North State League: the Ospreys have brought proud crowds from all corners of the community together. In further economic development, the city bought land to create an industrial park that can accommodate bigger businesses and well-paying jobs. Jacksonville is also improving its downtown for an even more inviting business environment and has elsewhere purchased hundreds of acres for event space to include athletics, arts and entertainment. Many cultural festivals highlight Jacksonville's diversity. New River Institutes at Sturgeon City hosts events, but more importantly connects with youth by offering environmental and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) programs.





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"We have a lot of talent in this area ... and we have to continue to provide avenues for that talent to come out," said Jackson, himself a published poet and currently building partnerships with the local arts council to expand the community's opportunities.

So much can be done with healthy connections and communications, Jackson said, putting contrast to any notion of working in silos to help populations. He also noted at the time of the interview that the city was working toward a rebranding campaign that will show the world that Jacksonville is "a city for all."

It's a mentality that works within municipal government as well, he added; a great, inviting community can make for a motivated corps of local government employees who feel secure in their positions and happy with their service to the public, advancing shared goals all the more.

"I'm big on collaboration," said Jackson, a theme so clear through his upbringing and professional style. "I learned if you bring the right organizations together, the mechanism to fulfill needs are already in place to connect to that need, to support to fulfill those needs."

It adds up.

"The best place I could be is working as a city councilman," he said. ■



Listening Sessions Foster Consensus Legislative Goals

SCOTT MOONEYHAM

Director of Political Communication and Coordination

THE LEAGUE'S LEGISLATIVE LISTENING SESSIONS OFFER A PLACE WHERE ELECTED OFFICIALS AND KEY COMMUNITY LEADERS SHARE STORIES AND INSIGHTS TO IDENTIFY COMMUNITY CHALLENGES. THESE DISCUSSIONS SHAPE LEGISLATIVE GOALS, ENSURING THAT THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF NORTH CAROLINA MUNICIPALITIES ARE EFFECTIVELY REPRESENTED TO LAWMAKERS.



Legislative Listening Session at the NCMA Fall Meeting 2024

The late TV and radio personality Larry King once remarked, “Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So, if I am going to learn, I must do it by listening.”

In a broad sense, that is the point of the NC League of Municipalities’ legislative goals listening sessions, held every two years as we kick off the policy goals development process ahead of the next legislative biennium.

Elected municipal officials are on the ground and know their communities. Tapping their knowledge and understanding the challenges faced by their towns and cities is the best way to learn about the collective needs of all cities and towns.

That is what these listening sessions, held across the state in late September and early October, are all about. In all, four regional sessions open to all municipal officials were held, with those events taking place in Asheville, Concord, Rocky Mount and Elon. Sessions, both in person and virtually, were also held for the League’s Board of Directors and affiliate groups the NC Mayors Association, NC Metro Mayors Coalition and NC Black Elected Municipal Officials. A separate virtual session, open to all members, also took place.

The goal of each, with League staff helping to prompt the discussion, was simply ... to listen. The next part was allowing that listening to turn into the seed of ideas that could become legislative goals that League members and staff could pursue before the North Carolina General Assembly over the next two years.

At the NC Mayors Association listening session, held as a part of the group’s larger meeting in Wilmington, more than 70 mayors from across the state formed groups of seven or eight around tables to bounce ideas off of one another related to what they are seeing in their individual communities.

Not surprisingly, common themes repeatedly emerged.

At one table, the mayors delved into the importance of regionalization when it comes to the provision of water and sewer service, while noting how those arrangements work best with incentives from the General Assembly, rather than mandates, that ensure ratepayers for the larger municipal utility are not penalized with higher rates.

“We need to be encouraging regionalization while helping smaller towns with funding and technical assistance,” said Broadway Mayor Donald Andrews.

That conversation also included discussions of the need to protect extraterritorial jurisdiction so that towns and cities can cooperatively plan for future growth and do so in ways that allow for water and sewer capacity to best be utilized.

Other topics of interest: Powell Bill funds not keeping pace with street maintenance needs as construction costs escalate, and the need for more audit assistance for smaller towns.

“Powell Bill funds are just not keeping up with costs, and on state projects, the more delays we see, the more the cost goes up,” said Bethel Mayor Carl Wilson.

At a virtual meeting open to all members, similar concerns were expressed about the need for more transportation dollars and the challenges of water and sewer regionalization.

In one of the breakout rooms during that meeting, participants also focused on the increasing costs to treat the “forever chemicals” often referred to as PFAS. “It’s hard to meet those standards,” said Butner Town Manager Jordan McMillen.

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The goal of each, with League staff helping to prompt the discussion, was simply ... to listen. The next part was allowing that listening to turn into the seed of ideas that could become legislative goals that League members and staff could pursue before the North Carolina General Assembly over the next two years.



Mayor Mike Allen, Mayor Steve Little, Mayor Glenn York (left to right) at NCMA Legislative Listening Session



Mayor Craig Warren at NCMA Legislative Listening Session



Mayor Angela Caraway, Mayor Carl Wilson and Mayor Ivory Mewborn (left to right) at NCMA Legislative Listening Session



That involvement, from municipalities big and small, from the mountains to the coast, ensures that legislators know that the eventual list of priorities is comprehensive and represents the thoughts and concerns in their districts. In turn, these legislative goals have a better chance of being enacted into law.

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That subset of participants also discussed the need to protect local control, with Wake Forest Manager Kip Padgett reflecting on how legislation now appears to be targeting individual municipalities when it comes to who controls growth.

On the issue of housing affordability, Padgett and others noted cities are increasingly providing incentives—either cutting various fees or allowing for density bonuses—to try to encourage affordable housing set-asides. It's not enough, they agreed, as rising land prices dictate more expensive homes and developers rarely take advantage of the incentives.

Multiply these two hour-long discussions among a handful of elected and appointed municipal officials by 25 or 30, and you begin to have an idea of the scope of legislative goals listening sessions.

By the conclusion of these sessions, more than 250 municipal officials representing more than 160 cities and towns had taken part in the collection of these ideas.

Once all the proposed policies and ideas are documented by League staff, it becomes the League's 65-member Policy Committees task to distill those ideas into concise goal language

and prioritize them. Those meetings were set to begin in October (following the deadline for submissions to this issue of *Southern City*).

After the committee whittles the goals down to around 15 or so priorities, the League's Board of Directors will examine them to further refine and make any changes. The full slate will then be put to the League's full members for a vote.

While there is no set requirement for the final number of legislative goals, they are likely to be pared down to 10 to 12.

That number allows the League to present a list of focused needs to legislators, and one that it may reasonably seek to achieve.

This comprehensive process, now frontloaded so that member-city officials have multiple opportunities to discuss their thoughts early on, invites the involvement of cities and towns from across the state. That involvement, from municipalities big and small, from the mountains to the coast, ensures that legislators know that the eventual list of priorities is comprehensive and represents the thoughts and concerns in their districts. In turn, these legislative goals have a better chance of being enacted into law. ■



Mayor Dawn Ward and NCLM's Chris Nida at NCM Legislative Listening Session



Rep. Shelly Willingham and Mayor Charlotte Griffin at the Rocky Mount Legislative Listening Session





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HURRICANE HELENE

THE POWER OF
MUTUAL AID IN
WESTERN
NORTH CAROLINA

ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

BEN BROWN
Communicaitons and Multimedia Strategist





As Hurricane Helene swept across the southeastern United States, the mountainous landscapes of Western North Carolina were transformed into scenes of destruction. The hurricane left communities grappling with damaged homes, flooded property, power and water outages. However, in the face of this adversity, the spirit of cooperation and mutual aid came alive across North Carolina as municipalities rallied together to support their western neighbors.

The Impact of Hurricane Helene

Category 4 Hurricane Helene made landfall up through the Big Bend region of Florida on the evening of Sept. 26, 2024, with maximum wind speeds reaching 140mph. As the storm traveled north through Georgia and into eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina, the storm poured rain forcefully down in the mountainous towns of NC in the early hours of Sept. 27. The unprecedented rains brought flash floods and landslides, wiping out entire downtowns and neighborhoods throughout western NC.

Marion Mayor Steve Little said the storm was almost incomprehensible to witness. He noted a main street in his area that became a river—"a raging, torrential, fast-moving river that was carrying logs and pieces of trees and debris and washing mobile homes off of their attachments and bringing them down the river," he said. "Cars being washed away. Things that we cannot even comprehend. We see things in movies or even cartoons and you see that happening and it's not real—but this was real, and it was happening."

Municipalities big and small lost cellular service for days on end, power for weeks, and some are still repairing water and sewer infrastructure—leaving many residents without clean drinking water.

"I think of those people that so needed desperately to call for help but couldn't because the cell phone—no communications worked for those folks. It's heartbreaking," said Murphy Mayor Tim Radford.

The physical and emotional toll on residents has been immense, but neighboring municipalities' emergency and on-going response has been a beacon of hope.

A Network of Support: The Mutual Aid System

North Carolina's mutual aid system is a robust framework designed to organize collaboration among municipalities during times of crisis. When Hurricane Helene made landfall, cities and towns across the state sprang into action, sharing resources and personnel to assist in recovery efforts. Firefighters, police officers, emergency medical technicians, and public works teams from various municipalities arrived in western North Carolina to aid in search and rescue operations, debris removal, and restoration of essential services. Not only did these teams provide hands-on assistance, but they also coordinated logistics, shared tools, and ensured that vital communication lines were restored.

Along with many other municipalities, the Town of Chapel Hill's emergency management team deployed ahead of the hurricane to begin preparing emergency shelter for those affected. As the storm rolled through western NC, Chapel Hill's fire and police department aided search and rescue efforts in Haywood and Mitchell counties. The parks and recreation department volunteered equipment to the City of Hendersonville to help clean up roads and debris.

Working with the NC Emergency Management Team, the Raleigh Police Department (RPD) was assigned to recovery efforts in the town of Black Mountain. Major Brian Harrison of the RPD said in a Raleigh newsletter that the "most important mission was to bring a sense of peace and safety to a community that was looking for some kind of normalcy."

RPD officers assisted the town of Black Mountain with security checks and checking in on welfare calls to confirm that community members were safe, and relaying that information back to concerned friends and family members. Additionally, RPD officers assisted at food and water distribution centers and provided delivery of essential items needed for residents who could not leave their homes.

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City of Charlotte Fire Team helping in western NC
Photo from charlottenc.gov



City of Kannapolis packing donation for western NC Photo
Photo from City of Kannapolis FB



Helene damage in Bat Cave, NC
Photo from NCDOT



City of Raleigh Fire Department deployment
to western NC Photo from @raleighgov on IG

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The City of Charlotte experienced flooding as Helene rolled through its communities, but once those waters receded, it became clear to Charlotte Fire's Swift Water Rescue Team that there was much more work to be done in Yancey County. The team, consisting of 17 highly-trained fire fighters, were deployed via ATVs, helicopters and on foot to the isolated mountain areas where families were stranded by the floods.

"There were moments when it was life or death," Charlotte Fire Captain Jeff Bright recalled in a Charlotte newsletter. "We found families stranded on their roofs, elderly residents trapped in homes surrounded by water, and people who had been completely cut off from the world for days. Our job was to get them out, and we did everything we could to make sure that happened."

These are a just a small few of the mutual aid stories that occurred out west. Other towns such as Apex, Cornelius, Kannapolis, Leland, Cary, and so many more, sent additional police and fire personnel, as well as public works staff to help fix water and cellular infrastructure for citizens.

The mutual aid system in North Carolina is not just about responding to disaster but also about long-term recovery. Support continues after the initial emergency response, with public works teams from across the state sent to assist in restoring water treatment plants, repairing roads, and restoring electricity.

Through the mutual aid system, municipalities not only provide immediate assistance but also demonstrate a commitment to the welfare of their fellow citizens, regardless of geographic boundaries.

"We will continue to work and move back. It's going to take time, but we will do all we can. We work together. And that's what's been the greatest thing, I think, out of this whole deal, is watching people come together to work and make things happen as fast as they could to help people get out of this situation," said Lenoir Mayor Joe Gibbons.

Resources from the NC League of Municipalities

The League has worked these past few months to understand the needs of our members and build out the resources to support those needs. In the immediate aftermath, the League partnered with Witt O'Brien's to host webinars on short-term needs including navigating FEMA public assistance programs, maximizing federal funds, and transitioning to a recovery-based economy. That webinar series is now available on our Vimeo (vimeo.com/ncleague).

Going forward, the League will continue to partner with experts in disaster recovery to bring hands-on, individualized training and support to municipalities across western N.C.

"Whatever the recovery needs of our members might be—everything from working with FEMA to keeping up with the day to day operations of the municipality—our goal is to have people at the ready who can respond and provide the direct, hands-on assistance that cities and towns need," said Chris Nida, League Director of Technical Assistance for Cities.

To further support the recovering cities and towns, the League named Regina Mathis and Desmond Worrell as Disaster Recovery Field Representatives who will be available to assist towns in their recovery efforts.



Regina was born and raised in Jackson County, NC, but now calls Bryson City her home of the past 22 years. She was previously the Town Manager in Bryson City and has experience working with FEMA during that time. She has been with the League for two years as a part of the American Rescue Plan and Municipal Accounting Services teams.



Desmond is originally from Canton, NC, and has been with the League since the summer of 2023. He has previously worked on our American Rescue Plan team and in our Government Affairs department.

Over the course of the recovery efforts, Regina and Desmond will be visiting western NC towns to help identify needs and be a point-of-contact for towns. They are available to answer immediate questions, consult with towns on working through FEMA paperwork, and connect towns with other departments, representatives, or resources.

FEMA Resources for Recovery

In addition to local efforts, residents affected by Hurricane Helene have access to valuable resources from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Local governments, houses of worship and other nonprofit organizations in 39 NC counties and tribal members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have until Jan. 7, 2025, to submit Requests for Public Assistance (RPA) from FEMA. The RPA is the first step for public and private nonprofit organizations to apply for federal disaster assistance.

FEMA offers various programs, including:

- **Individual Assistance:** Financial aid for temporary housing, home repairs, and other disaster-related expenses.
- **Public Assistance:** Grants for state and local governments to support debris removal, emergency protective measures, and the repair of public infrastructure.

Residents can apply for FEMA assistance online at disasterassistance.gov or by calling the FEMA helpline at 1-800-621-3362.

A Call to Action: Community Resilience

As western North Carolina begins the long process of recovery, the outpouring of support from neighboring municipalities and the state exemplifies the strength of community resilience. Local leaders and volunteers have been working tirelessly to ensure that those in need receive the help they require.

The League encourages all communities to remain engaged, whether through direct aid, organizing volunteer efforts, or spreading awareness about available resources. Many local businesses, restaurants, and hospitality options in the impacted areas are now ready and eager to welcome tourists to the region. Tourism is a critical part of the recovery process for western municipalities. The influx of visitors helps support local economies, secure jobs, and rebuild vital community infrastructure.

"The economy of western North Carolina is so much tourist-oriented. We have to have help from the state and federal governments for roads clearing and for rebuilding roads so that people can come and see the beauty of our mountains. That's what so many people have as their source of income. It's vital," said Mayor Little.

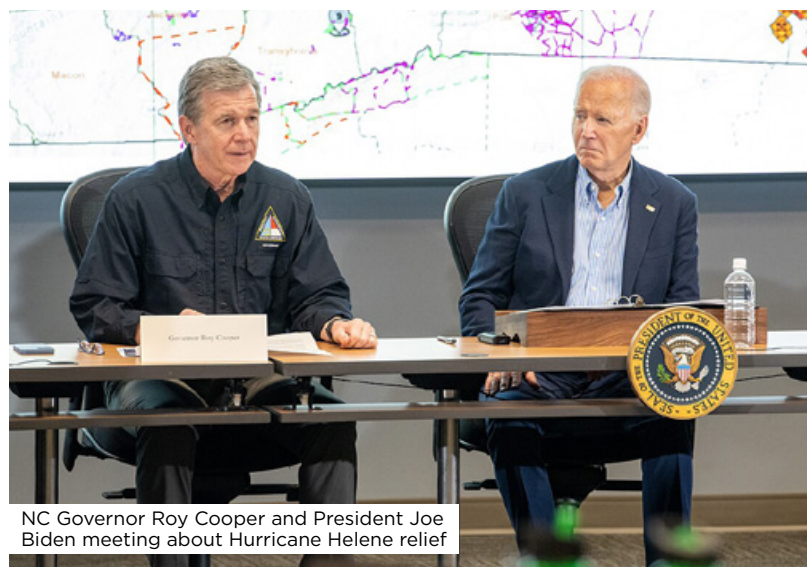
Even towns that sustained minimal physical damage were affected.

"The messaging came that all of western North Carolina is closed. So, we lost a lot of tourism dollars because of that," said Murphy Mayor Radford, a town that didn't receive much damage but neighbored areas that did.

"I know how hard we are going to be hit with our budget, because sales tax is so important," said Brevard Mayor Maureen Copelof about tourism concerns. She said she's spoken with businesses that reported being down 75% from normal earnings for the time of the year. "We know it's going to ripple over to us ... That message that western North Carolina is open, that has got to get out there."

Before traveling, please be sure to check road conditions and local updates at visitnc.com and call ahead to confirm services and amenities. Safety is always a priority, so make sure all is clear before you go—but most importantly, help these communities rebuild by enjoying the beauty of western North Carolina!

By working as one, we can advance the recovery efforts and help rebuild our communities stronger than before. As western municipalities continue to face the challenges ahead, the League stands ready to support municipalities and their residents in every step of the recovery journey. Together, we will rise, rebuild, and reaffirm our commitment to each other and to the values that bind us as North Carolinians. ▣



NC Governor Roy Cooper and President Joe Biden meeting about Hurricane Helene relief



Town of Cary Fire Department traveling to Asheville, NC for deployment
Photo from @caryncgov on IG

PROPERTY & CASUALTY INSURANCE MEMBERS:

To file a hurricane-related insurance claim, contact the League's claims team at CATclaims@nclm.org or **800-768-8600**. We have deployed our CAT Response Plan to ensure timely response to Property & Casualty Trust members' property losses.

CityVision

GREENVILLE | APRIL 29-MAY 1 2025

CityVision 2025 will be in Greenville at the Greenville Convention Center! You don't want to miss the opportunity to connect with hundreds of municipal leaders and local government partners during 3 days of educational sessions, networking events, and exploring all that Greenville has to offer!

For more information visit the CityVision website at
cityvision.nclm.org.

APRIL 29 - MAY 1, 2025

**MORE
INFORMATION**



MUNICIPAL EQUATION



ON THE PODCAST: NCLM'S MUNICIPAL EQUATION PUTS THE ISSUES IN CONVERSATION

Civility in leadership; private “auditors” of government; modern policing challenges; generative artificial intelligence in city hall – some of the recent topics we’ve expanded into conversation on our long-running podcast at the League. Municipal Equation, found on all streaming services comes out monthly with expert guests and explorations of issues both classic and emerging for North Carolina cities and towns.

While episode 82, in June, dug into the always evolving and challenging world of city hall communications with constituencies, October’s episode 85 took on the possibilities of civility in communications among government leaders, routinely working with potentially thorny, emotional or divisive public matters that invite varied perspectives. On the mic with host Ben Brown for the episode was League Director of Learning and Development Vickie Miller, who described civility as “the hard work of staying present, even when there are those deep-rooted and fierce disagreements.” The two discussed the ins and outs of sensitive discourse and how the answer isn’t in feigned kindness or the surrendering of convictions. “Civility to us is about understanding that it’s OK to disagree,” Miller explained on the show, adding that disagreement can be respectful and productive. “And, as a part of good governance, seeking common ground is always a starting point for dialogue – particularly about those differences.” Miller went on to flesh out the context and commonly seen difficulties that inspired the creation of Commit to Civility, a certification course the League offers local governing boards.

True to the title, the course creates commitments among board members to handle the business of the public with mutual understanding and grace. To find more information about the course itself, which comes from the League’s Advancing Municipal Leaders program, just head to nclm.org and type “Commit to Civility” in the search bar. (The League’s regular newsletters also provide links to these and other offerings.)

Upcoming episodes at the time of this writing include looks at community transportation ideas and connection needs as well as how towns have put American Rescue Plan funds to maximal use. The League first launched Municipal Equation in 2016 to further diversify its statewide communications and serve as a conversation hub for thought-provoking ideas and happenings in the space of cities and towns. Find it on your favorite listening app, search the vast library of past episodes, and feel encouraged to suggest any topic that might make for interesting or enlightening discussion. Contact Brown at bbrown@nclm.org.

LISTEN HERE:



ARPA Story Site Explores Town, NCLM Efforts

SCOTT MOONEYHAM

Director of Political Communication and Coordination

THE LEAGUE'S WRAL HUB, "INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE," HIGHLIGHTS AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN INVESTMENTS IN NORTH CAROLINA MUNICIPALITIES. IT AIMS TO INFORM RESIDENTS ABOUT PROJECT IMPACTS AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP.

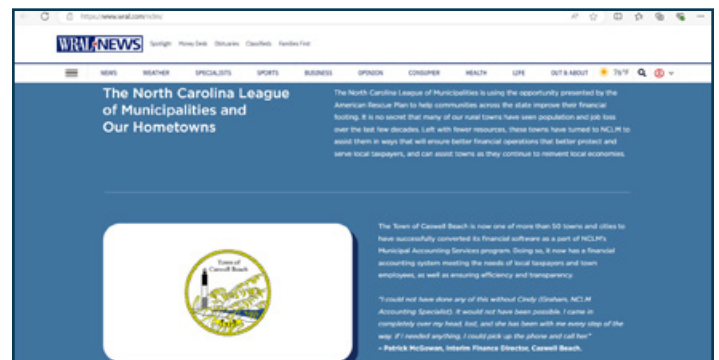
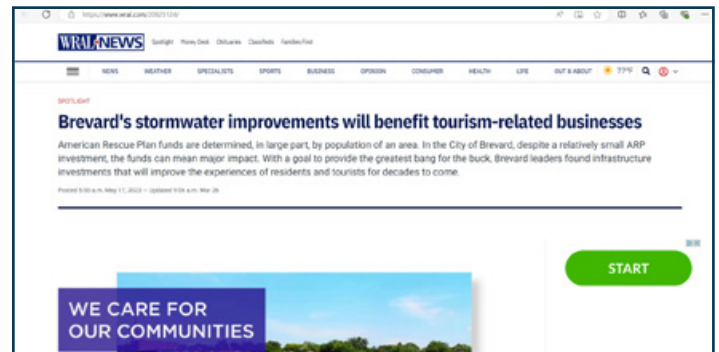
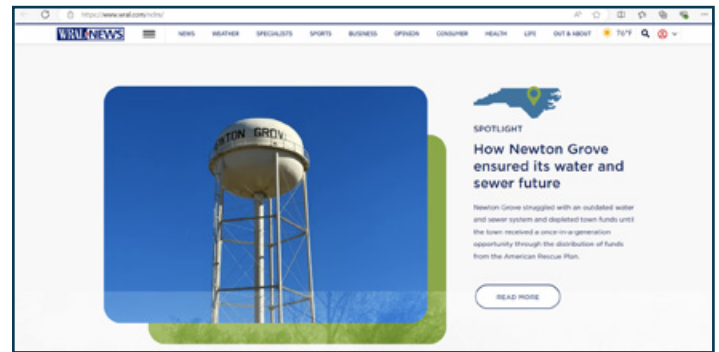
Among local government officials, it is no secret that cities and towns across the state have been using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to make investments that are having positive effects on the lives of residents.

The backstory of those investments and their effects may not be so well known by those residents themselves. A new content hub, called Investing in Our Future, on the WRAL news website is helping to bring some public attention to these investments and their effects, as well as the League of Municipalities' efforts to assist municipalities to helping make these projects happen and to aid towns with their financial operations. This interactive hub can be found at wral.com/nclm/.

The site is more interactive than previous efforts in promoting these stories, making for a more engaging experience for readers. And in addition to the site itself, our agreement with WRAL will lead to each article being promoted through online and social media advertising, assisting in more people learning about the value of these investments and their real-world effects.

The site currently has stories exploring ARPA-related projects in Newton Grove, Wilkesboro, Brevard, Apex, Wilson, Waynesville, Sylva, Spruce Pine, and Havelock.

We encourage you to look at the site, using the QR code on the following page, and promote it on your own social media channels. Demonstrating that cities and towns are good stewards of these dollars ensures that we will maintain that kind of infrastructure and other support at the state and federal levels well into the future. ■



HERE ARE A COUPLE OF EXCERPTS FROM THE WRAL HUB:

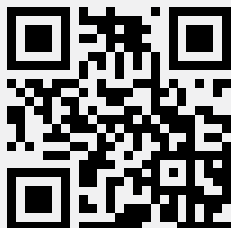
» **“For a small municipality, investing \$2.5 million** into infrastructure is a very big deal,” said (Brevard) Mayor Maureen Copelof. “These investments will last for decades ...

“For example, one area receiving stormwater improvement will be Times Arcade Alley, a street that hosts restaurants, shops and various businesses. The popular destination is regularly stricken with stormwater problems. It is also an area that city officials agree needs some aesthetic improvements. Brevard’s plan is to use ARP funds to fix the stormwater and, once the area is dug into, then use general funds to improve paving, add green space and bury utility lines.”

» **Newton Grove officials recognize that upgrading water systems** is not the flashiest project, but it is one that is vitally important to residents’ daily lives and one that requires an enormous amount of time and money.

“A lot of people do not understand what it takes to run a waste treatment plant or to run a clean, clear drinking water system. I hope our municipality and other communities understand that it takes so much,” Newton Grove Town Clerk and Zoning & Planning Administrator Amanda Bradshaw said.

Besides those looks at the continuing investments that cities and towns are making with ARPA funds, the new site also provides testimonials from town officials regarding NCLM’s commitment and effort to ensuring compliance with federal accounting and audit rules, as well as the League’s broader work to strengthening municipal financial operations through its Municipal Accounting Software program.



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TAKING THE FIELD

Together Through Adversity



ROSE VAUGHN WILLIAMS
NCLM Executive Director

As the vibrant hues of autumn begin to paint our beautiful state, western North Carolina is faced with extreme challenges as we face the horrific destruction of Hurricane Helene. Much worse than the tremendous property loss, infrastructure compromised, homes, businesses, cars and more, was the awful loss of life. It is a heart breaking, unimaginable loss that I don't think we've ever seen from a storm in North Carolina. It will never be forgotten.

Local governments in North Carolina reached out to their fellow towns in trouble immediately. Within a very short time after the storm dozens of local governments from around the state had signed up to help through the Mutual Aid System. As of the day I am writing this note, over 500 local governments had signed up to help those governments in need in western North Carolina. Many of you have helped individually as well.

The response to Hurricane Helene has highlighted the importance of collaboration among municipalities. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all municipal officials and employees who mobilized resources and offered assistance to their neighbors. In doing so you put yourselves in difficult living circumstances and at risk. Your dedication during this crisis exemplifies the spirit of public service and community.

In the wake of such challenges, it's also crucial that we focus on the future. For western North Carolina that will include securing financial relief for rebuilding and recovery and strategizing how to rebuild the economies the cities and towns had developed and more. League members are currently deep in the process of developing our legislative goals for the upcoming legislative biennium. This process is not just a task—it's a collective effort that involves input from municipal officials across North Carolina. We want to ensure that our legislative priorities reflect the needs and aspirations of all our communities. Scott Mooneyham's article in this issue shares about the process and the meetings that have been held around the state both in person and virtually. We thank the chairs of the Legislative Policy Committee, Concord Mayor Bill Dusch and Knightdale Mayor Jessica Day. These are your legislative goals for cities in North Carolina, so we want to hear from you.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to serving your communities, especially in times of crisis. North Carolina cities are responding to this crisis with broken hearts but are approaching the future with determination and hope. Together, North Carolina's cities will work on the long-term job of recovery and a building a brighter future for all North Carolinians. ■

North Carolina cities are responding to this crisis with broken hearts but are approaching the future with determination and hope. **Together, North Carolina's cities will work on the long-term job of recovery and a building a brighter future for all North Carolinians.**

In Memoriam

This new addition of 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.



LOUIS "BOBBY" BROWN

Passed away on November 3, 2024
at 94 years old

» Former Navassa Mayor



ROBERT C. W. NICHOLL

July 5, 1937–July 10, 2024

» Retired Dunn City Manager
Former Kitty Hawk Town Manager



FRED ELBERT GIBSON, JR.

September 11, 1949–November 12, 2024

» Former St. Pauls Mayor



EDDY PATTERSON

June 9, 1945–February 24, 2024

» Former Pleasant Garden Councilman and
Mayor



YVONNE JOHNSON

October 26, 1942–December 4, 2024

» Former Greensboro Council Member and
Mayor Pro Tem

Yvonne Johnson served on the NC League
of Municipalities Board of Directors from
2022 to 2024.



STEVE SMITH

September 4, 1951–September 13, 2024

» Former Topsail Beach Mayor



JOHN KIRKLAND

April 27, 1932–September 28, 2024

» Former River Bend Mayor

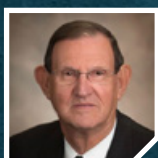
Mayor Kirkland served on the NC League of
Municipalities Board of Directors from 2001
to 2005.



GRAHAM C. STALLINGS

May 30, 1938–November 23, 2024

» Former Youngsville Commissioner



JERRY M. MEDLIN

August 23, 1937–November 13, 2024

» Former Benson Mayor



RONNIE (RON) HAROLD SURGEON, SR.

January 14, 1953–March 18, 2024

» Former Pleasant Garden Mayor and
Councilman



RICHARD CONRAD TURNER

June 26, 1962–July 31, 2024

» Former Belmont Mayor

Mayor Turner was the incoming District
11 representative for the NC League of
Municipalities Board of Directors.

Entries on this page are by submission only. 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.



Risk Management **Board of Trustees 2024**



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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



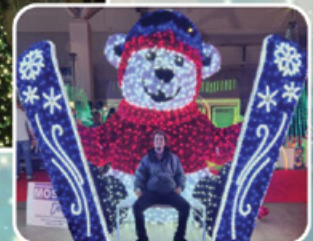
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