

SOUTHERN CITY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



Navigating Workforce Challenges

HOW MUNICIPALITIES ARE
INNOVATING FOR EMPLOYEE
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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JONATHAN MELTON: RALEIGH'S NEW FORWARD-LOOKING LEADER



SOUTHERN CITY

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*The League extends its deepest sympathies to the family of past Belmont Mayor Richard Turner who died July 31, 2024 at the age of 62.



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2024 UPCOMING COURSES

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November 13 Online

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Master level LELA 201

Capital Budgeting and Infrastructure Finance

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Asheville

9 CREDITS

In The Hot Seat: Leading through Public Scrutiny

October 30, 2024

Chapel Hill

6 CREDITS

Mentor level LELA 301

Affordable Housing Seminar

October 4 Chapel Hill

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Strategic Planning: Linking Strategies to Results

October 23 Online

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SPEAKING OUT

The Troubling Trend of Local Partisan Election Mandates



MARK-ANTHONY MIDDLETON
NCLM President

Over the course of the last few legislative sessions, we have seen local bills—and some of them passed into law, others not—mandating that local elections be changed from non-partisan to partisan. It's a troubling trend.

These pieces of legislation, often part of larger bills with unrelated provisions, sometimes are aimed at a specific municipal or other elected board. Other times they are aimed at all local elections in one county. Most recently, the General Assembly approved a bill that would, among other things, require that all of the municipal elections in Forsyth County be held on a partisan basis. Currently, Winston-Salem is the only city or town in the county that does so.

In response, the mayors of Kernersville, Clemmons, Lewisville, Walkertown, Tobaccoville, Bethania, and Rural Hall sent a letter to legislators expressing their opposition to the move.

Those mayors wrote: "Recognizing that there is nothing partisan about fixing potholes, making sure the garbage is collected and keeping our neighborhoods safe, we strongly affirm that as non-partisan bodies we are better able to serve our residents and make decisions based on the best interest of our residents."

It's an important point that, at the local municipal level, elected officials often deal with issues neither incumbered by nor wrapped up in the tinge of partisan politics. Often, locally elected officials have little or no authority to affect issues that dominate federal and state politics, issues that can and do become embroiled in partisan controversy.

Neither Durham, Wilmington, Lewisville nor Clemmons will be solving immigration law in this country; we won't be legalizing marijuana; we won't be determining military aid for Ukraine.

As the good mayors said, we will be fixing potholes. We will also be doing our best to keep our communities safe and provide amenities that make them great places to live for residents.

Why would anyone want to bring the current state of partisan polarization to those local issues?

It is true that two of our largest cities, Charlotte and Winston-Salem, along with a few others, have chosen to elect their municipal representatives on a partisan basis.

But in my city of Durham, we have kept our elections nonpartisan, and people seem fine with that choice.

And it is that choice, by local residents and their locally-elected officials, that ought to decide the matter.

Our U.S. Constitution establishes a federal system of governance, with political power being shared at the various levels of government. The founders understood that the best way to prevent the abuse of political power was to disperse that power among many groups and many people. Those views have evolved over time to become even more inclusive of more groups and more people, but they always involved the ability of local governments to represent the interests of local residents as they considered local concerns. The principle remains the same.

While the state certainly has the power, under our state constitution, to make these changes affecting local elections, doing so is not in keeping with these ideals.

As state legislators reflect on these types of changes, it would be good for them to keep these ideals in mind. ▣

We are all thankful for the services and advocacy that the League of Municipalities provides, and **we are committed to keeping an eye toward the future.**



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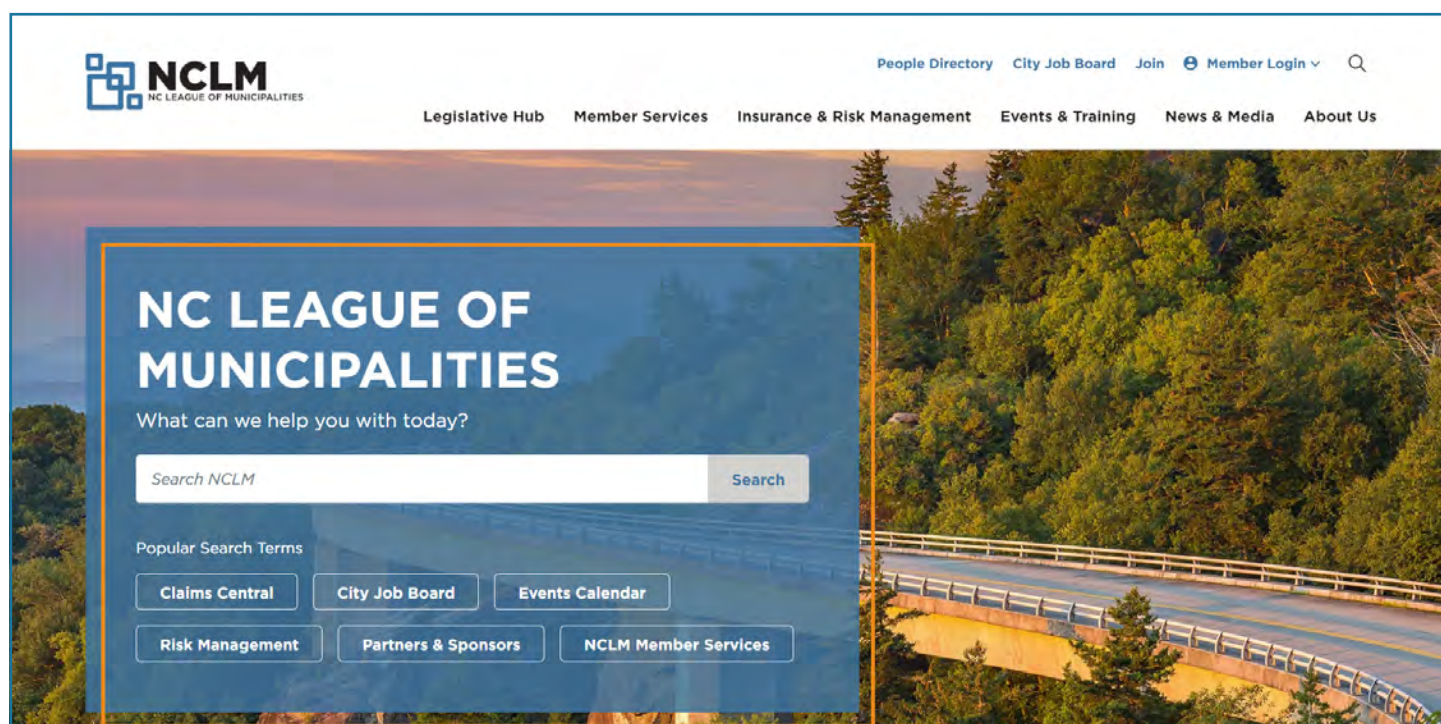


New NCLM.org Is Here for You!

SLICK OVERHAUL MORE EASILY CONNECTS MEMBERS, SERVICES

BEN BROWN

Communications & Multimedia Strategist



Lengths of time, feedback analysis and strategy toward a nimbler experience—with North Carolina’s municipal officials always first in mind—have all led to the unveiling of a new, much-enhanced nclm.org, the long-time web home of the N.C. League of Municipalities.

The new nclm.org, which went live in early July, is a cleaner, easier experience for anyone in search of services, media, calendar activity and other output from the League as it supports the needs of its 540 member cities and towns in ever-changing times.

“The new site took us over a year to revamp, and it represents big changes to the way the website looks and functions,” said Kristin Milam, NCLM’s director of

The new nclm.org, which went live in early July, is a cleaner, easier experience for anyone in search of services, media, calendar activity and other output from the League as it supports the needs of its 540 member cities and towns in ever-changing times.

Strategic Communications and Member Engagement, whose team led the redesign. “We sought out suggestions from members and staff, alike, and worked with our vendor to implement as much of this feedback as possible.

“The final product has a more modern look and feel,” Milam continued, “and, more importantly, it offers members a more organized and streamlined site that will require fewer clicks to find the information they’re looking for.”

Whether it's legislative services, League events, insurance offerings and claims filing, job listings, the staff directory, news updates or links to publications like our magazine or podcast, **the new nclm.org makes everything so much easier to find and engage with.**

Up top, you'll find an intuitive, "mega menu" with easy links to popular resources. If you're on a laptop, hover your cursor over, for example, the Member Services portal, which reveals a slate of direct links to services and consulting options. If you're using a smartphone, you'll find the same menu and options in the sandwich menu (the three bars at top-right, which you can tap to open). There is so much fast access through this mega menu, which also neighbors your member-login portal.

The League's development team also spent critical time boosting the site's internal search function, which is one of the first things you see upon visiting. Type in what you're looking for, or check out the easy, direct links immediately below the search field; they'll take you right to the results of already-popular search terms on nclm.org, like "Claims Central" or "Risk Management."

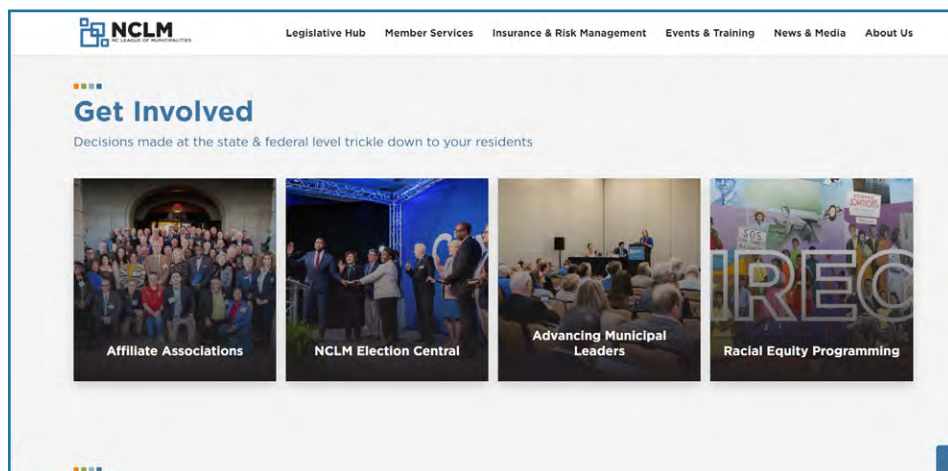
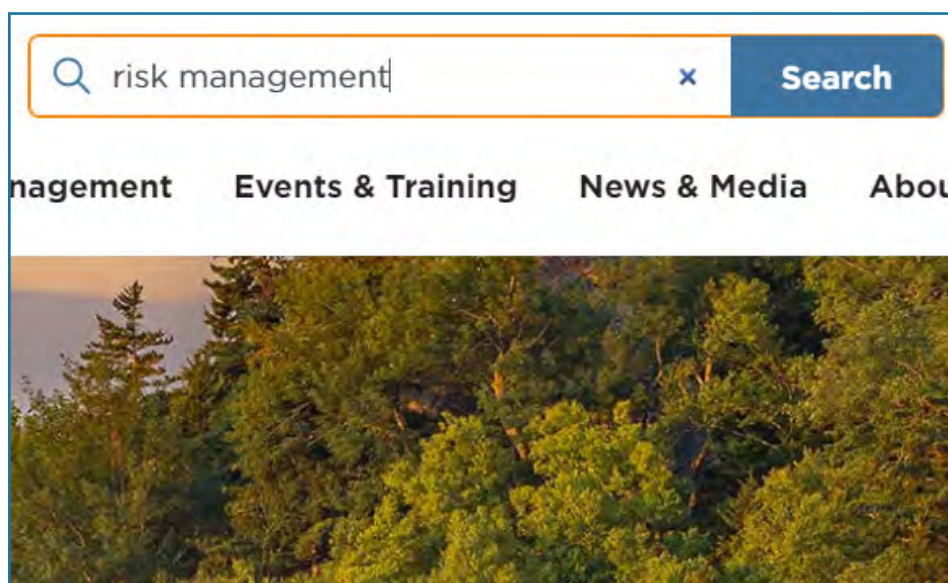
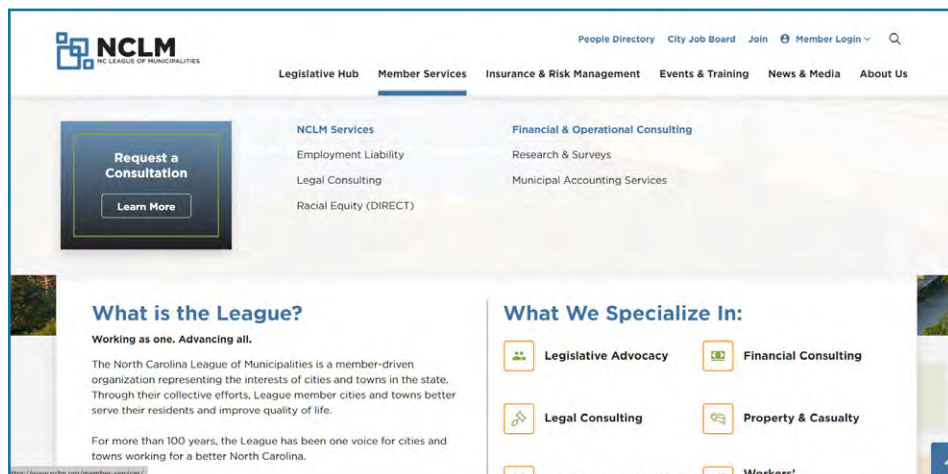
Scroll down a little bit and you'll see more ways to access NCLM's specialties, and farther down for info on upcoming events. Below that are links to ways you can get more involved with NCLM—affiliate associations, League Board of Directors elections, our Advancing Municipal Leaders program, and our racial equity education.

There's so much more, and it's all an easy surf.

Whether it's legislative services, League events, insurance offerings and claims filing, job listings, the staff directory, news updates or links to publications like our magazine or podcast, the new nclm.org makes everything so much easier to find and engage with.

"Like any website, nclm.org requires routine content updates and enhancements," Milam noted. "I hope members will continue to share their feedback with us so we can keep making it better!"

Maximize your League experience with speed and ease. Visit the all-new nclm.org on your computer, tablet, or smartphone. ■



Jonathan Melton: Raleigh's Forward-Looking Leader

JACK CASSIDY

Learning and Development Project Manager

QUICKLY MOVING FROM NEWCOMER TO ESTABLISHED VOICE, MELTON HAS A STEP-BY-STEP VISION FOR THE CAPITAL CITY.

Jonathan Melton remembers clearly his first time speaking as a candidate for Raleigh City Council.

Specifically, he remembers one crowd member's reaction.

"I get done speaking and walk off the stage, and this person comes up to me," Melton recalls. "She says, 'No one knows who you are and you will never win.'"

This was ahead of the 2019 municipal elections, at a time of significant change in Raleigh. The city was growing, and Melton did not believe the emerging needs that accompany that growth—housing, transit and accessibility, among others—were being adequately addressed. He recalls the difficulties he had personally in finding a place to live and in getting to and from work downtown. Melton had been an involved citizen during his 15 years in Raleigh, but this was his first foray into local politics.

"There's this feeling that you are an outsider and that you won't be accepted by this established group involved in city affairs," Melton said.

"When she said that, I thought, 'Well, I'm definitely going to win now.' I was going to prove her wrong."

Throughout Melton's career, two characteristics seem to consistently shine bright: determination and inclusivity. This was a moment to tap into both, and it catalyzed Melton's approach to campaigning and then to local office.

He knew the issues he prioritized were important and pressing to his community. These were not far-flung ideals—they were problems fundamental to the wellbeing of both his neighbors and the city as a whole. Perhaps, he thought, the challenge was not an inability to resonate with certain members of the already-engaged group, but rather that the group of citizens included in the discussion was not large enough.

"I understood that not everyone was going to agree with me," Melton said. "Instead, we tried to reach more people. It became an activation campaign." Specifically, Melton targeted those that had voted in state and federal elections, but often sat out municipal elections. The strategy proved effective in an election that saw Raleigh elect a new mayor and return only three incumbents to its seven-person council. "If you look at the margins of that election, it was the new voters that made the difference," he said.

Local politics, while not a long-held goal of Melton, is a natural landing place for the driven and always-involved North Carolina



native. Raised in Mooresville, Melton moved to Raleigh to attend North Carolina State University, where he majored in Political Science with an eye towards a legal career. After a quick stop in Durham to attend law school at North Carolina Central University, Melton moved back to Raleigh in 2011. He worked two years as a law clerk at the North Carolina Court of Appeals, then moved into family law at Gailor, Hunt, Davis, Taylor & Gibbs, PLLC, where he has worked now for more than 11 years.

Through that professional period, Melton kept an eye on the needs of his community. While at NC State, he served on the student senate and interned with the Government Affairs office within the Chancellor's Office. Then, upon graduating, in addition to his focus on large-scale issues, such as the aforementioned housing and transportation problems that impacted the early years of his career and that motivated his eventual run to public office, Melton saw a community need in the area of recreation. He became a founding board member of Stonewall Sports, a community-based, nonprofit sports organization for LGBTQIA+ people and their allies. Melton is the first openly LGBTQIA+ person elected citywide in Raleigh.

"Stonewall Sports is something I'm really proud of," Melton said. What began as an effort for inclusivity in his community is now a nationwide success. Stonewall Sports now has 28 chapter cities across 20 states.

Through his work with Stonewall Sports, Melton started his interaction with local government. He needed to work with the Parks and Recreation Department to coordinate schedules and to reserve sporting venues. That work allowed Melton to develop both connections within city hall and an interest in further involvement.

"I started to think about joining one of Raleigh's boards and commissions," Melton said. "I thought that would be a good

I get done speaking and walk off the stage, and this person comes up to me. She says, **'No one knows who you are and you will never win.'** There's this feeling that you are an outsider and that you won't be accepted by this established group involved in city affairs. When she said that, I thought, **'Well, I'm definitely going to win now.'** I was going to prove her wrong.

way to get involved." When he reached out to his connections, however, he did not hear back. The boards and commissions cycle came and went, and he was not appointed to one.

Determined as usual, Melton decided to forgo that stepping stone altogether. "I said, 'Well I'll just skip that and run for office.'"

In his five years on council, Melton, now Mayor Pro Tem, has an impressive list of accomplishments, many of which address the priorities that pushed him into public office in the first place. Raleigh has successfully addressed zoning changes that encourage housing affordability and is on the path to developing several bus mass transit lines. He's worked towards attracting and retaining Raleigh's city staff as well—one of the best municipal workforces in the country, Melton says—allowing for further innovation and service delivery to residents. He was sworn in to the League's Board of Directors in 2023. And in more administrative areas, such as construction and permitting, he's worked to simplify processes to support small businesses.

Melton often takes a step-by-step path towards these goals. Given the enormity of some of his priorities—housing and transit among them—a piecemeal approach can be difficult to commit to. But Melton says that he doesn't concern himself with the size or scale of the fixes. He simply stays determined towards the end vision.

"I try not to look at it that way. Anytime I start to veer in that direction, I instead start to look at it as one chunk at a time," Melton says. As an example, he points to the transit improvements presently underway in Raleigh. Those upgrades comprise many different elements, from rezoning efforts to infrastructure upgrades to increasing service capacity, and more. "If you try to fix it all at once, it's overwhelming—you won't be able to. But incrementally, you can achieve change. We've had significant successes."

He found many of these successes quickly, even despite his first months in office coinciding with the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, when it was difficult if not impossible to connect with community members and even his fellow councilmembers.

"You ran, you're confident in your ideas, but you also want to get it right. Part of that is just getting your sea legs," Melton said. Now two terms in, his effectiveness and impact on his community has only grown. "Once I was re-elected, I was more sure of myself. I understood how things work at City Hall, the cadence of decision making."

Throughout Melton's progression—first as an outsider, then as a newcomer, and now an established voice for Raleigh—inclusiveness still guides his leadership, not just towards the residents and communities of Raleigh, but for the newly-elected officials on the City Council.

"There's no hierarchy," Melton said. "But having been there, that confidence is important. I try to the extent that I can share information, that's always helpful."

His plans for the future are much the same as his plans for the present: to better his community, to take on large challenges, and to achieve them bit by bit, step by step, and determined and resolute the whole way. For the growing, changing and dynamic capital city, Melton's approach has proven to be the right one.

"It's all working together," Melton said. "There's a lot to be excited about." ▣



Legislative Policy Committee Kicks Off Goals Process

NCLM'S LEGISLATIVE POLICY PROCESS IS GEARING UP AS ITS 65-MEMBER COMMITTEE COLLECTS INPUT TO SET GOALS FOR THE NEXT BIENNIUM, ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES LIKE LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE, FUNDING, AND STAFFING CHALLENGES.

SCOTT MOONEYHAM

Director of Political Communication and Coordination

As summer merges into fall, NCLM's legislative policy process will be kicking into high gear.

It's the time, every two years, when the League Government Affairs Teams uses a variety of means collect input in the formation of the Legislative Goals for the next legislative biennium. And those playing a key role in that process are the members of the Legislative Policy Committee.

That 65-member committee, representing a diverse array of towns and cities from across the state, immerses itself in understanding both the critical policy issues affecting all cities and towns, as well as the political realities facing municipalities as they seek state policy changes.

While some of those policy concerns may change, many of the concerns of locally elected officials remain consistent: local infrastructure including water, sewer and roads; local funding and the ability to control various revenue options; and staffing-related issues. Regardless of how the final wording is structured, those needs are almost certain to be a part of municipal priorities now and into the future. New challenges, though, can arise due to growth, changes in the economy or other societal trends.

To fully consider the full range of challenges and issues, NCLM and the Policy Committee have typically held listening sessions, in person and online, as well as solicited ideas online.

A process that ensures widespread input and involvement of League member cities and towns will again be a part of the process this year.

Consider that in 2022, 111 officials from cities and towns participated in those in-person and virtual discussions. From those meetings and online submissions, 408 separate ideas were considered. From those ideas, the Policy Committee and NCLM Board of Directors ultimately put a set of consensus ideas before members. Then, 155 cities and towns approved a top



As this policy process continues ahead of the next 2025-26 legislative biennium, **we urge you and your colleagues to also be involved.**

10 list of goals, making up NCLM's final legislative agenda.

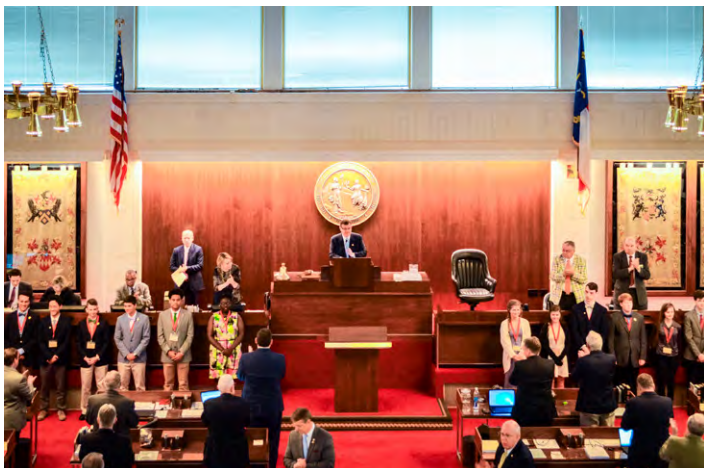
While there is no set requirement for the final number of legislative goals, it is expected to roughly mirror that number for the next legislative biennium. Having a manageable number of goals allows NCLM to present a list of focused needs to legislators, and one that it may reasonably seek to achieve.

Meanwhile, it is that widespread involvement—by municipal officials from cities large, small and in-between, from all areas of the state—that gives the policy goals their force. It allows NCLM staff and

municipal representatives to make the case that these aims represent the collective desires of all cities and towns, including those within the districts of legislators setting state policy.

And the involvement of so many towns and cities can prove crucial to their success or failure at the General Assembly.

As this policy process continues ahead of the next 2025-26 legislative biennium, we urge you and your colleagues to also be involved, and to then do what you can to make a new set of legislative goals become reality. ▣



Town of Spencer Utilizes ARPA Funds to Move Towards the Future While Honoring the Past

THE TOWN OF SPENCER HAD ITS START AS A RAILROAD TOWN AND IS MOST WIDELY KNOWN AS THE HOME OF THE N.C. TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM. BUT A NEW VISION FOR THE TOWN AND THE RECEIVING OF AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN DOLLARS HAVE ALLOWED SPENCER TO MOVE TOWARDS THE FUTURE AND INVEST IN PROJECTS THAT WILL SERVE THE TOWN BOTH TODAY AND IN THE LONG TERM.

STEPHANIE HUGHES

Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)



The Town of Spencer, which sits northeast of Charlotte in Rowan County, had its start as a railroad town and still honors that identity today. Centrally located between Atlanta, Ga., and Washington, D.C., the town was established with the building of a maintenance facility by the Southern Railway. The project began in 1895, leading to the town's incorporation in 1905.

"You have this booming industrial presence in the Spencer Railways maintenance facility that employed thousands of people, a lot of them lived in town and walked to the shops. And you have a very urban feel in our little town of 3,000 that you do not really see elsewhere because of that," said Peter Franzese, Spencer's town manager of the last three-and-a-half years.

After several decades of the town thriving, steam power was replaced with other industries, and the railway determined to build new facilities elsewhere. Over the following decades, jobs and industry dwindled, leaving Spencer in a period of stagnation. However, after Southern Railway moved out of the town in the 1970s, the land was donated to the state and the Historic Spencer Shops began to take shape. This site would ultimately be renamed as the North Carolina Transportation Museum which now attracts 150,000 visitors a year with events such as the "Thomas the Tank Engine Experience" and the "Polar Express."

In more recent years, Spencer's local government officials have gone through a transition, and the new leaders have placed a priority on developing a new vision for the town and moving forward into the future, rather than solely relying on its connection to the past. One of those leaders is Spencer Mayor Jonathan Williams, who took office in 2019. Along with Franzese, Mayor Williams shares an excitement for the future of the town.

"I describe Spencer as a charming southern town that maybe for many years was kind of stagnant, but just in the last five years or so, it has gotten a lot of life and vitality to it. It is a place where folks can come and settle down, set down roots, start their families," Williams said.

"Our hope is that people now see that Spencer is a great place to live because we have a unique quality of life due to our size and some of the recreation amenities that we are starting to develop," Franzese explained. "We want visitors to not come to the Transportation Museum and then look across the road to what was the core of town looking like a sleepy, vacant storefront-filled place. We want them to see that the town is lively, and it offers a lot of fun things to do."

This new vision was just getting underway when the town learned they would receive approximately \$1 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The town determined to use the funds to replace lost revenue from the pandemic, which allowed them additional flexibility in investing in the projects they desired. The town chose multiple areas to invest in that will impact residents and visitors in many ways. Additionally, the town has taken the initiative to find creative ways to make these funds extend beyond the initial amount received.

One such project was a stormwater update in which the town planned to invest over \$100,000 simply in design work. Instead, they spent approximately \$12,000 in ARPA-enabled funds to bring in a design consultant that prepared them to apply for and ultimately be awarded with a planning grant through the Department of Environmental Quality totaling over \$400,000. Then the town later received another \$1.9 million in grant funding for the construction project.

As a part of the new vision for the town, leaders have focused on building up the town's recreation amenities and pursuing opportunities to promote economic development through recreation. The town hopes these projects will not only create an important space for current residents but will encourage non-residents to visit and invite them to stay in Spencer.



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» Jonathan Williams, Mayor, Spencer

"We have these recreation projects that are transforming our town and creating a better quality of life for the folks that are here, but also for visitors who may be coming to town anyway and give them something else to do," Franzese shared. "We now have a strategic plan all around how we create economic development through recreation that we are going to be working off of and that has opened up additional grant opportunities."

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We want visitors to not come to the Transportation Museum and then look across the road to what was the core of town looking like a sleepy, vacant storefront-filled place. **We want them to see that the town is lively, and it offers a lot of fun things to do.**

» **Peter Franzese**, Town Manager, Spencer

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The Yadkin River Park Trailhead is one of these recreation projects; it connects to the Wil-Cox Bridge pedestrian crossing, providing Rowan County access to Davidson County's expansive park. This project included the creation of a landscaped plaza, the start of a greenway connection between the center of town and the river, and vehicle parking where parkgoers can enjoy both sides of the river. The town had already secured outside grant funding for this project, but still needed an additional \$71,000 to get it over the finish line. They utilized some of the ARPA-enabled funds to fill this gap and move this project to completion. The trailhead opened in September 2023 and won the Centralina Regional Council's Improving Quality of Life—Small Community award for "utilizing cooperative volunteerism to expand community, recreational and transportation opportunities."

Another recreation project that is focused on bringing the town's past and future together is the reinstalling of a former park site at the center of town. The park was originally created by residents in the 1920s but was paved over during the building of a shopping center and is now part of the parking lot. The town plans to invest approximately \$2 million—most of which has come from grant funding—into the rebuilding of this park, but as with

many projects today, the initial estimates for the project proved insufficient once the project was ready to go out to bid. ARPA-enabled funds have been important in helping to bridge these sorts of gaps, in addition to applying for additional grant money to supply the rest of the needed funds.

"We have been so fortunate through the COVID relief funds that we have gotten, as well as a significant philanthropic donation ... We have been able to package together the funding to make this park a reality that otherwise probably would not have been able to happen, especially in today's construction market when costs have skyrocketed," Williams said. "So, with minimal investment from our taxpayers, we have been able to take that investment and been able to multiply the funds that are available, particularly because of COVID relief funds."

Beyond recreation, there were a couple of buildings in town that needed repairs, including a fire station where ARPA-enabled dollars allowed the town to do some concept design work in preparation for an upgrade, as well as the town's historic library. Town officials first set aside the funds to replace the library's windows but adjusted this plan to have them painted and



reglazed, preserving the historic windows while saving the town money.

“It has made a great difference in the appearance of the library,” Beverly McCraw, Spencer’s library director, said. “It was cracking and peeling, and it does look much better, and we are getting more customers.”

Another exciting prospect for the town is the creation of the Rowan IDEA Center—an entrepreneurship and innovation center that will serve as a business incubator and coworking space. The town has a former church facility that could be revamped into this new center, with the necessary space to consider additional features such as a culinary incubator and on-site childcare. ARPA-enabled dollars offered the town the opportunity to explore this project and to help determine the best path for the town.

Finally, the town pursued another opportunity to extend the ARPA-enabled funds through the purchase of several new vehicles. In addition to three police vehicles and a fire vehicle, the town put down payments on a new fire engine and a garbage truck. The garbage truck will provide additional benefits by transitioning from a rear-load garbage truck to one with an automated sidearm. This will allow the town to reduce the size of the garbage crew from three people to a single person driving the truck, meaning they can now utilize those employees in other ways within the public works department, increasing their productivity.

Eddie Smith has worked in the waste removal industry for 30 years. He admits there has been a learning curve for residents as the department shifts to the automated truck, but they have already been able to reduce the garbage collection crew to two and hope to soon start running it with only one person.

“It is faster, and it is safer,” Smith said. “It is good to have, especially weather-wise. You are not outside in the rain for long periods of time. You are inside, out of the heat.”

“This [purchase] is allowing us to be more efficient in that process and improve the way we do it. And it is safer for our staff,” Franzese said. “There are a lot of reasons why we were really thrilled to be able to make this change. And it is not very glamorous, but I would say it is really important.”

Overall, Spencer has taken on several projects that will serve the town today and in the long term. They have the vision in place, and now they have access to the funds to make that vision a reality.

“The way all of these things have worked together over the last few years has allowed us to do things here that I think for a long-time people wanted to do or maybe had ideas, but they just did not know how to raise the funding to make it happen,” Franzese said. “It has allowed us to do a lot of different things at one time that really were not a possibility beforehand.” ■



NCLM ARP Field Representative Charles Hines and Spencer Town Manager Peter Franzese.



Town of Spencer historic library.



Town of Spencer town hall.



It Starts and Ends With Conversation

BEN BROWN

Communications & Multimedia Strategist

REP. REECE PYRTLE ON THE JOY OF WORKING WITH PEOPLE

Coffee shops, for communities of just about any size, are in that circuit of classic catch-up spots, where folks regularly process or transact together. Whether it's the news crawl, personal life, or thoughts on the happenings locally, you can often find a good conversation at the coffee shop, noted state Rep. Reece Pyrtle on what was essentially a random Thursday morning in a java stop in uptown Eden called the Roasted Bean, where indeed a group of involved locals (not limited to Mayor Neville Hall, coincidentally) were caffeinating and casually going over the latest. For an elected official, particularly a state representative, connecting with people over conversation and common ground might just be the nature of the job. But for Rep. Pyrtle—a retired police chief who entered elected office as a county commissioner in 2016 before his appointment to the N.C. House in 2021—that's the very point of interest. Over morning coffee at the Roasted Bean, Rep. Pyrtle spoke with Southern City about how, for him, public service truly is fulfilled by steady conversations and connections with people, including those from places of disagreement. But, first, we had to discuss the latest.

...

What's been going on in your world? As we speak, we've just wrapped up the primary work of the 2024 legislative short session.

RP: Well, I enjoy being retired. And so it gives me a lot of opportunities to go around to different areas of the county and spend some time with different folks. Today I was at a—I'm a member of all the chambers here in the county and I try to attend their networking events and spend time having conversations with the constituents. You know, one of the things that I shared with them this morning is that, now that we're out of session, my office remains open, and if there are any issues, please call. We have an amazing staff of great problem solvers, and I said, "You know what? Even if your problem isn't necessarily something that we can handle or we can take care of, we can at least point you in the right direction or connect you with somebody that maybe can mitigate whatever issues you're having." And so, I've grown up in Rockingham County, you know, I'm a product of this county, and one of the things that I've always been doing—whether it was my background in law enforcement before I got into politics, or as a county commissioner, or now as a state representative—is just keeping those relationships open and active; I think that's important. I think from a political standpoint, you know, one of the things that I pride myself in is that, as a police chief, you came into my office with the problem; I didn't care where you live. I didn't care anything about your socioeconomic background. And I've just taken that with me as a county commissioner and now in the North Carolina House. You call my office with an issue. I don't care what your party affiliation is. I don't care if you contributed to my campaign. My staff's going to try to resolve your issue the best we can. I pride myself on trying to serve everyone in



Rockingham County, and not just those that supported me when I was running for election.

What inspired you to run for election or enter public service, to begin with? Some people go through life appreciating people but it never crosses their mind to jump in like that.

RP: It's something I've always had an interest in. My grandfather actually ran for sheriff of Rockingham County as a Republican, and I want to say that was in the '50s. So there's a little bit of politics many years ago in the family. My dad was a World War II veteran, born in 1925. He passed away in 2004, had me kind of late in life. But he was always engaged in local, state, and even at the federal level, the political climate, maintaining what was going on in the world. He was one of those guys that read the paper from cover to cover, and he would often cut out articles for me to read. Because he was concerned I may not have seen it in the paper, about what's going on. But he was very conservative. His best friend in this world was also a World War II veteran. My dad was in the Navy. His best friend was in the Marines. His best friend was on the other side of the political aisle, so to speak. And they often had great conversations. So, I think I got that from my dad. We often had great conversations about what was taking place in our community and in our state.

So, you've preserved that aspect of life in public service, but it still comes with sacrifice. What makes it worthwhile?

RP: You know, I'm a people person. So, I enjoy meeting people and having discussions about issues with folks that, although we don't often agree, I think it's important to understand the flip side of the pancake. One of the things I've often said is that every pancake's got two sides. And I think it's important to understand that although you may not agree with the different ideas, and outcomes that ought to take place, I think it's important to understand where the other person is, where the other side's coming from. And so, I value that. I really enjoy that. But I also

One of the things I've often said is that **every pancake's got two sides.** And I think it's important to understand that although you may not agree with the different ideas, and outcomes that ought to take place, **I think it's important to understand where the other person is, where the other side's coming from.**

enjoy making a difference. Knowing that you've done something that's going to have a long life, it's going to have an impact on the future generation. I have one child. She's a sophomore at Appalachian State (University). That's where I graduated from, that's where my wife graduated from. And she did really well in school. And when she started looking at going to college, one of the things I told her, I said, let's look at the North Carolina University system first. Yeah, I'm a little bit prejudiced, but I think North Carolina has the greatest university system in the nation. And I said let's look there first. And then we'll look in the private sector, and we'll expand from there. But, you know, she was blessed, she had choices. And she chose Boone (Appalachian State), and I couldn't have been more excited. And there was no stipulation on there that "that's the only one that I would pay for," nothing like that. But that's what she chose. And my wife is an educator. She's got 33 years in public education. And she works for the county school system. And my daughter, that's what she's interested in doing. And I think that's a very noble profession. I'm more proud of the choices that she's made. And to be honest with you, that's what I almost did. I was going to teach math and coach baseball. And as a matter of fact, when I retired, a friend of the superintendent said, you know, there's a pathway for lateral entry if you're interested in doing that. And at that point in time in my life, I just couldn't work that into my schedule. I still now try

to play golf a couple or three days a week. So yeah, that I'll try to work that into my schedule.

And you can meet constituents and have conversations out on the golf course, too.

RP: Absolutely, absolutely. But that's kind of my background. My dad, I think my dad was really the most influential on me. He unfortunately passed away in 2004, and I really didn't get into the political arena until 2016, as a county commissioner, and actually, you know one of the things unique about that was it was something that I had been thinking about doing as opposed to talking about doing, and the opportunity presented itself, and I took it. And actually, for the last year of my career as a police chief (in 2018), I was also a county commissioner. So, I was a police chief in Eden and a county commissioner. And I knew I was going to retire. I mean, that was never in question, because I shared that during my political stump speeches. I shared with them, I hope to get elected to county commissioner, but I'm real sure I'm going to retire in December. So, it was. It was fine. And I think that's one of the things that's really helped me, as I shared earlier, is that spending 30 years in working for a municipality. I was there as a county commissioner about five and a half years before I moved to the General Assembly, and then being in the

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North Carolina House. I understand the layers, so to speak. I understand that when you make a decision at the state level, how it's going to trickle down and impact the county and the municipalities. Because as I was working in the municipality, I was on the receiving end of that, quite often: when a decision at the federal level or the state level was imposed, how that impacted us.

So, given that and your experience in local government, you know how powerful it can be to align communications and understand disparate issues that can come up. How do you view effective communication? What works best between you and the different entities you have to keep open lines with?

RP: Well, I was just talking to the Chamber of Commerce folks, about what's going on, and one of the things that I shared with them at the end is that, you know, I've had the same cell phone number since I was the number two guy at the police department in 2002. And I kept that number when I retired and was a county commissioner. And I kept that number when I left the county commissioner and went to the North Carolina House. And I share that with you because I was actually going to Raleigh, it's been about a year ago, I got a call and it was a gentleman who was having issues. He said right in front of his house there's water coming out of the road, out of the pavement, there's a water leak. He said, "I don't know who to call." I said, "Well, what's your house number?" So, he told me, and so after I got his house number, you know, I still got all my contacts. I called the director of public works and said, "Hey, there's a gentleman over here, really nice guy, he's having water

issues, he's got a water leak from the house, and he's concerned about his water being turned off and all that." He said, "I'll get somebody over there." So that evening, I called him back and said, "Look, they're gonna have somebody take care of it. They'll be in touch with you. Let me know if you have any other issues." So that evening, I called him back. I was coming home from Raleigh, it was just a day trip. I said, "Hey, I just want to touch base with you. Did the city take care of it?" He said, "Oh, absolutely. They were over here shortly after I talked to you, and they knocked on my door, said you're going to have the water off for a while, and they cut my water off, they fixed it, repaired everything, got my water back on, knocked on my door, said I'm good to go." He said, "I really appreciate you taking care of that. That's helping people." I've never worked in the private sector. I've been law enforcement, and it's about helping people. The county commission, same thing. I'm helping folks and I look at what I do now is in the same capacity. They're trying to provide, meet the needs.

It's nice because it's in recognition that we're all really trying to help people, even though we may have various styles of doing so.

RP: Yes, that's what it should be about. Our short session is unofficially ended. We still got some dates we're gonna meet, but we're out for the summer. My office remains open, and I have an amazing staff that are sitting there. And if you have an issue, and you happen to not have my cell phone number, you can call my office, our staff will shoot me an email ... because I'm telling



Rep. Reece Pyrtle with Edén Mayor Neville Hall (far left) and Edén Councilman Greg Light (middle).

I like people. I like having the conversations, and I like making a difference. And **I hope that at the end of the day when I retire, they think, you know what? Somebody cared about his community and tried to make a difference** in his community. Yeah. So that's me. I'm pretty simple.

you I've got some amazing folks that work for me, who are able to reach out and jump right on it, and they love helping people, too. That's very beneficial, is having good staff, and I do, I got blessed. It's also recognition that, you know, one person can't do everything. It's definitely a team. It's who you bring with you, who you build, who you trust to share with you.

How does your team tend to process nuanced, complicated or verging issues?

RP: It's a lot of reading, but also, we have a lot of folks within our caucus and even within the General Assembly that are subject matter experts in a lot of fields. And I often have members come to me and say, "Hey, you were a county commissioner. Tell me about what your thoughts are on this. What do you think the commissioners association will think about this?" And it's one of the things where I have some very smart very talented folks that are in the General Assembly and in my caucus. And I will lean on those folks. And plus, I have amazing staff when I have questions. Obviously, you have to be dependent upon the ongoing staff and you have to have some relationships. To me, it's all about relationships. You know, fostering and cultivating those relationships. When I was a police chief, when I first got to the police, appointed a police chief here, one of the first things I did was create a reason for all the chiefs to get together and the sheriffs to get together, and we invited this attorney that I was really after the most. Because when you create a relationship, when it comes that, if you have to make that ask, it's much easier to make it if there's a relationship in place. And if you're the recipient of that ask, it's much easier to say yes and understand why that ask is being made. Even when you might have hit just a little pothole, that relationship will help. Those potholes won't be quite as deep if there's a relationship in place. And I did the same thing as a commissioner when I was chair. One of the things I did was direct the manager to find an issue. Let's have dinner and get everybody together, all the elected officials in one room, the town council and all that good stuff. And let's get together, have dinner and talk about an issue that's impacting us all. Well, the information was important. But it was that breaking bread and having those conversations that took place before, during, and after the event that I think was most beneficial... When I was working with the municipality and even with the county, there's things that did or didn't happen at the state or federal level. And a lot of times, you know what, we had to depend upon ourselves. We had to look to see what we could do with our span of control to mitigate the issues that were impacting our community. And in Rockingham County, you know what, it didn't just impact the community that I served as a police chief. It would impact the community 10 miles down the road in Reidsville, 12 to 14 miles up in Madison ... and so you know we had some some very good conversations on what we could do within our span of control to work together to address the issue to address this quality of life issue. It was huge, I mean I remember one of the big ones that we had was trying to address some of our mental health issues and the serving that population that of consumers that were in crisis that didn't have any resources. They're still part of our community ... and that's really what kind of got the ball rolling and helped me realize how big these relationships were. That was in the early 2000s before I was the police chief. And we worked hard, and then as the police chief, I continued that and tried to expand on it.



On the flip side, being a retiree, you could just sit back and let the stress go, keep the focus at home and so on. But, staying involved to the extent you do, do you still find time for yourself? Ways to break away and enjoy the coffee?

RP: Like I said, my wife is a school teacher; my daughter is a sophomore, she'll be a rising junior at Appalachian State. And so, during football season, we may make our way to a college football game now and again. I'll be honest, I play golf when I'm here. I try to play golf at least twice a week, sometimes a third day. I enjoy doing that. My mom is 85 ... I've got to take her to the doctor today. She's still in good health, I still go with her and visit and talk to her on the phone. I'll go by her and see her every day. She's liable to call the police department to do a welfare check on me if I don't go by there and see her. So, you know, that's family and friends. Let me tell you a good thing about retirement. You know, somebody said it to me, but I didn't believe it until I actually retired. If I wake up one morning and I have nothing on my calendar pressing, I go play golf. By the time I go to bed that night, I'm sitting there wondering: I started off really not much to do, and by the time we go to bed, I wonder how I got it all done. Really, being engaged in the community. And I do everything from the Boys and Girls Club Board of Directors and so on, and that takes up some time, too, when you engage in all that. Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, there is always something going on. And that's fine. I enjoy staying active. I really do. And I enjoy people. So that's what makes it easy. I've been blessed, got some great relationships, made some great friends since I've been in the General Assembly... There's so many great people there, it's a pleasure to be around... I like people. I like having the conversations, and I like making a difference. And I hope that at the end of the day when I retire, they think, you know what? Somebody cared about his community and tried to make a difference in his community. Yeah. So that's me. I'm pretty simple. I think I'm a simple person. I'm just trying to do the right thing. Not just across Rockingham County, but across the state of North Carolina. And I've had that opportunity. ■

Slower is Faster

NCLM'S "DEFENSIVE DRIVING: SLOWER IS FASTER" HANDS-ON COURSE TRAINS NORTH CAROLINA POLICE OFFICERS IN ADVANCED DRIVING SKILLS, REDUCING ACCIDENTS AND ENHANCING SAFETY. OFFICERS APPLY NEW TECHNIQUES, IMPROVING DRIVING STANDARDS ACROSS THEIR DEPARTMENTS.

ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

Last April the League's Risk Management Services team hosted its annual "Defensive Driving: Slower is Faster" training for police officers in Winston-Salem. This two-day comprehensive course teaches and trains police officers throughout North Carolina how to use their squad vehicles as an effective tool, instead of a liability.

Because of our Property & Casualty and Workers' Compensation insurance pools, the League can offer a unique perspective on the unsafe patterns happening in policing across North Carolina. Our risk management team knows the most common types of claims filed and the highest liability factors in the policing profession. Therefore, the defensive driving course was born.

"We're trying to reduce claims, we're trying to reduce injuries, lawsuits, all of the basic stuff that you see, unfortunately, happening in the profession," said Tom Anderson, NCLM director of risk control and public safety risk management.

Anderson has over 30 years of combined experience in law enforcement and has seen both sides of the insurance claims process. Over time he's realized that many of these unfortunate accidents are completely preventable.

"The training, the policy and the leadership is a big component of that. When I think of risk management, especially in public safety, it is a leadership priority," said Anderson.

And the leadership of police departments attending the defensive driving course wholeheartedly agrees.

This course focuses on training the trainer. It includes a full classroom day where various speakers from the League, the Town of Hillsborough, and the National Law Enforcement Roadway Safety Program presented best practices on defensive driving.

The next day, attendees took their fleet cars to the Winston-Salem fairgrounds



This course focuses on training the trainer.

It includes a full classroom day where various speakers from the League, the Town of Hillsborough, and the National Law Enforcement Roadway Safety Program presented best practices on defensive driving.

and practiced the techniques they learned on a racecourse with professional driving coaches.

Since the defensive driving course started, over 100 different towns have been represented by their police training officers at this two-day event. The League insures over 5,000 law enforcement officers across the state. Trainers can take what they learned from the course and bring it back to their towns to implement new safety practices and policies.

"The information over the two days—classrooms, resources, in-car training behind the wheel, instruction from coaches—allows them to go back to their departments and customize these trainings for their individual departments needs," said Eric Peterson, Hillsborough town manager.

Peterson has been racing sports cars for over 30 years and has participated in a variety of motor vehicle sports. Over 10 years ago, the Hillsborough chief of police asked Peterson if he could help their police department develop a safety driving course with the expertise of his background. Peterson happily agreed. Through the town's relationship with the League, and Peterson's connections to the racing community in North Carolina, the "Defensive Driving: Slower is Faster" course was formed.

The present-day Hillsborough Chief of Police Duane Hampton is a partner of the League in teaching this course.

"The overall quality of driving we're seeing is improving. Younger officers are being more aware, being more cautious, realizing the responsibility that comes with the driving," said Hampton.

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RMS TRUST MATTERS CONFERENCE 2024

Join the League's insurance and risk management staff for a two-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.

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One of the most inherently dangerous things that cops do is drive cars. **We want everyone to be safe, whether it's the community or the officer driving the car.** Taking subtle changes along the way when they are responding at a high rate of speed or in a high-stress pursuit, they can successfully do that.

» **Joseph Graziano**, NCLM Public Safety Risk Management Consultant

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The police training in North Carolina requires cadets to learn many things to ensure citizen safety, as well as their own. One aspect of this police training is driving. While officers are trained on what to expect and safety practices on the road, the League's defensive driving course recognizes the need for a more in-depth training experience.

"We need to think more about what we're doing and realize that these decisions that we're making have a huge impact. We're trying to change that culture, getting officers to slow down ... give themselves a safety buffer that sometimes we didn't do in the past," Hampton continues.

"One of the most inherently dangerous things that cops do is drive cars," said Joseph Graziano, NCLM public safety risk management consultant. "We want everyone to be safe, whether it's the community or the officer driving the car. Taking subtle changes along the way when they are responding at a high rate of speed or in a high-stress pursuit, they can successfully do that."

The League continues to develop and implement training for its members where it is needed most. The "Defensive Driving: Slower is Faster" course has proven to be an invaluable resource for police departments across North Carolina. By equipping officers with advanced driving techniques and safety practices, the course is helping reduce accidents and enhance road safety. Officers return to their departments with new skills and a fresh perspective, spreading safer driving habits throughout their departments. The hands-on experience and expert instruction are making a tangible difference, leading to improved driving standards and fewer incidents. As the League continues to support these training efforts, the commitment to safer roads and more effective policing remains strong. ▣





NCLM Risk Control Field Services team, (from left to right) TJ Deluca, Matthew Reid, Tom Anderson, Joseph Graziano, Amy Whisnant, and Darius Chisholm.





Navigating Workforce Challenges—

How Municipalities Are Innovating for Employee Recruitment and Retention

ISABELLA MORMANDO
Communications Associate

In recent years, municipalities across North Carolina have encountered challenges in hiring and retaining their workforce effectively. From recruitment hurdles to retention issues, local governments are grappling with a complex landscape that demands innovative solutions. As municipalities continue to face these challenges, it is important to understand the causes and investigate policy and workplace culture changes that are slowly shaping the landscape.

Many of these employment challenges local governments are facing are not exclusive to local government employees. For instance, as new generations age into adulthood, they bring a new set of values and what work means to them that all employers must adapt to.

Also, the competition for skilled workers has intensified. Municipal governments are struggling to compete with private sector employers who can offer competitive salaries with attractive benefit packages. Qualified candidates are quickly recruited by businesses.

If this hurdle is surpassed and local governments are able to attract qualified candidates, then another set of problems sink in—retaining employees. Local governments are struggling to retain mid-career professionals who may desire career advancement opportunities or a better work-life balance elsewhere.

Additionally, the continuing retirement of baby boomers is creating a knowledge gap that

municipalities, must address to preserve institutional knowledge which allows new employees to succeed and thrive.

WHAT CAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DO TO COMBAT THESE ISSUES?

One of the most common local government professions struggling with these issues is policing.

“Since 2020, we have seen a large decrease in the number of individuals that are looking to come into law enforcement as a profession,” said Bill Hollingsed, Executive Director of the NC Association of Chiefs of Police (NCACP). “There are a lot of things that have come into play over the last several years that it’s been harder to find good, quality, qualified applicants to come into the profession.”

One of the largest shifts in the ways local governments are hiring police candidates is “sponsoring” cadets in the Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET) program.

In the past, individuals who wanted to enter the policing profession would pay their own way through North Carolina’s mandatory BLET program. Then, with that necessary certification under their belts, cadets could apply to various policing positions as a qualified applicant.

Today, municipalities are much more involved in the BLET process. Many cadets are scouted by police departments ahead of the program. Municipalities hire cadets and pay them a salary as they embark

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The competition for skilled workers has intensified. Municipal governments are struggling to compete with private sector employers who can offer competitive salaries with attractive benefit packages. Qualified candidates are quickly recruited by businesses.

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on the program. Their job security is dependent on successfully completing this training.

The difference is “we have to work harder to get qualified applicants into the law enforcement profession,” said Hollingsed. And this shift in the BLET process is one example of how some municipalities are doing so.

As previously mentioned, hiring qualified applicants is only one part of the problem. Local police departments must adapt to new-generation work cultures to get good candidates to stay.

“That goes back to taking care of our people, whether that is through officer wellness or through career development,” said Hollingsed.

Many police departments across the state of North Carolina are heavily invested in officer wellness. New strategies are being researched and implemented as a way to ensure police officers are happy and stay in their local-government careers.

Hollingsed cited a couple of examples he’s seen throughout the state, such as early warning systems.

“It’s not to notify us of a problem with an officer for disciplinary reasons, but to save that career ... If we can intervene earlier, either through counseling or additional training to save officer careers, that is our goal in the long run,” said Hollingsed.

To support this effort, the North Carolina General Assembly awarded the NCACP with a \$1.5 million grant in 2023.

Since then, the NCACP has been administering the grant across North Carolina police and sheriff’s departments who are interested in officer wellness.

“Anything that can help that agency increase the level of wellness, whether that’s physical or mental health, these grants will help those agencies get those programs up,” Hollingsed explained.

Outside of the policing profession, other municipal departments are facing similar issues and offering similar solutions.

Focus on employee wellness is happening across all jobs in local government. One way the League is supporting these efforts is through our Health Benefits Trust (HBT) Wellness Grants.

Members of the League’s HBT medical program are eligible to apply for a portion of the \$100,000 allotted by the Risk Management Services Board of Trustees. Members can apply to host various wellness initiatives, such as: financial management classes, fitness classes or equipment, nutrition or stress management educational speakers, and much more.

The Central Pines Regional Council recently identified the need for enhanced employee wellness programs. In response, they applied for and received HBT’s Wellness Grant. With this funding, they conducted a Mental Health First Aid training day for its staff.

The League is proud to offer this support to HBT pool members who are looking for ways to improve employee wellness and, in turn, retention.



NCLM police officer defensive driving training in Winston-Salem.





Central Pines Regional Council mental health first aid training.

By focusing on employee wellness, career development, and mentorship, local governments are adapting to the changing workforce landscape and building a more resilient and engaged workforce for the future.

There are several innovative approaches being implemented across the state. By focusing on employee wellness, career development, and mentorship, local governments are adapting to the changing workforce landscape and building a more resilient and engaged workforce for the future. As these initiatives take root, they may serve as a model for other regions grappling with similar workforce issues, ultimately ensuring that local governments can continue to serve their communities effectively. ■




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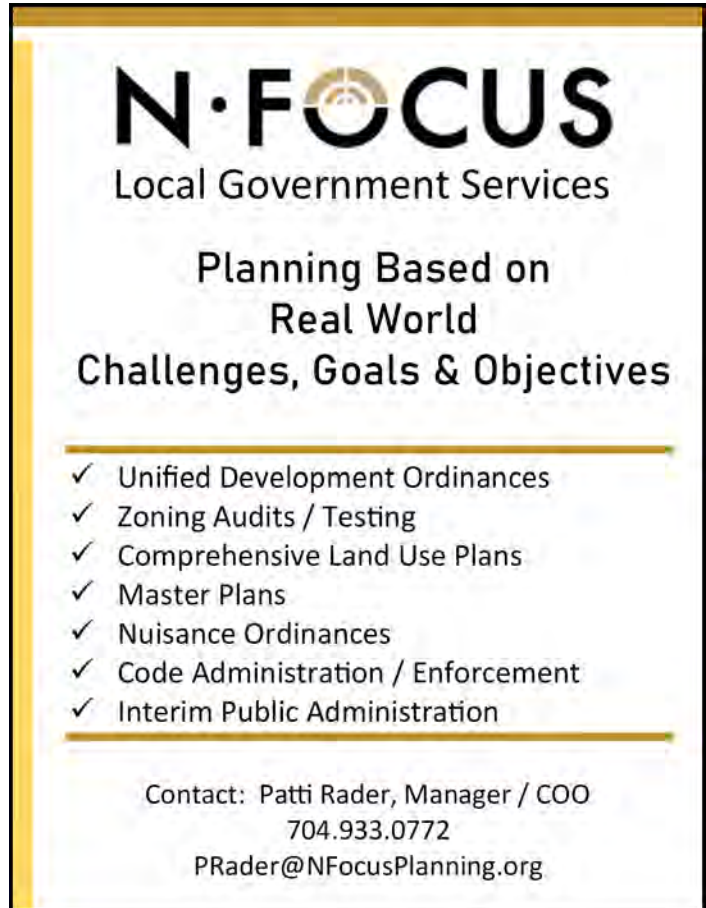
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NCLM Launches

‘COMMIT TO CIVILITY’

Program

JACK CASSIDY

Learning and Development Program Manager



The commit to civility program showcases a governing board's commitment to a civil, respectful, and effective approach to local leadership. Our next training takes place October 17, 2024.

Disagreement and debate are features, not flaws, of the democratic process. Nowhere is that process more effective than in local government, where decisions are made that have a direct impact on the lives of communities.

A requirement of democracy, however, is civility. An uncivil debate is simply an argument. An uncivil disagreement is a fight. When looking at our larger, national political climate, civility is too often bypassed, and our communities and citizens suffer as a result.

NCLM's Commit to Civility program looks to maintain local government's civil and respectful approach, and strives to educate municipal officials about their role in civil society by equipping them with the tools needed to be effective in participating in it and leading their communities. This program will help leaders obtain the information and skills that will help with maintaining composure in emotionally charged situations.

"There is a growing lack of civility that has permeated all aspects of society, including interactions with local government," said NCLM Executive Director Rose Vaughn Williams. "North Carolina cities are working to set the example that there can be a healthy exchange of ideas, vigorous debate and disagreement all in the atmosphere of respect."

The objectives of the Commit to Civility program are to understand that:

- Civility is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with deep-rooted and fierce disagreements.
- Civility is inherently political, not only because it's a prerequisite for civic action, but because it's about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone's voice is heard.

continues on page 34



A requirement of democracy is civility. An uncivil debate is simply an argument. An uncivil disagreement is a fight. When looking at our larger, national political climate, civility is too often bypassed, and our communities and citizens suffer as a result.

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» Rose Vaughn Williams, Executive Director, NCLM

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For your town to achieve its Commit to Civility Certificate, elected officials must complete the following steps:

- First, at least 75% of a municipality's governing board must attend NCLM's Commit to Civility training. This course is free of charge. (The next offering is online on October 17.)
- Second, course participants must sign the individual pledge.
- Third, the municipality must adopt the 'Commit to Civility' Resolution at an upcoming council meeting (a template is provided at the training).

- Lastly, the signed copy of the Resolution and the individual pledge forms must be submitted to NCLM.

Towns across North Carolina are already pursuing their Certificates! Join us on October 17 to begin your Commit to Civility journey.

More information can be found at nclm.org/aml, or you can reach out to the NCLM Learning and Development department at learning@nclm.org. ■



THE LEAGUE'S PODCAST IS BACK.



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

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

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

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

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

issue? Are you tackling old issues in new ways? What's happening in your area that might make for a good discussion on this podcast? Let us know. The sky is the limit when it comes to fascinating topics out of local government. Contact host Ben Brown at bbrown@nclm.org.

The newest episodes of Municipal Equation and the entire archive of past episodes are available online by scanning the QR code below, or find episodes through your preferred podcast app.



The Town of Franklin is Sowing the **Seeds** of the **Future**

BOB SCOTT
Former Franklin Mayor



The Town of Franklin's new Women's History Park features a striking sculpture, "Sowing the Seeds of the Future," celebrating diverse women's contributions. Initiated by Former Vice Mayor Barbara McRae, it honors Cherokee, Black, and pioneer women through art and history.

What began purely as an idea for a walking trail with plaques to honor women of the past in Franklin and their contributions morphed into Franklin's newest park with a splendid sculpture of three women destined for international attention. The sculpture is of a Cherokee woman, a Black woman and a pioneer woman. Known now as the "Sowing the Seeds of the Future," the sculpture is the centerpiece of Franklin's Women's History Park.

The idea began with the late Barbara McRae, who at the time was Franklin's Vice Mayor. She had a vision and a desire to promote and recognize the accomplishments and contributions of local women. She called it the Women's History Trail (WHT). Regrettably, McRae did not live to see her dream of the first women's history trail in North Carolina. McRae passed while in office.

The statue is sculpted by internationally known sculptor Wesley Wofford, who lives near Franklin, in Cashiers. Wofford sculpted the famous, 2,500-pound bronze traveling statue, "The Journey to Freedom," which depicts Harriet Tubman and a child. That statue is currently traveling the United States.

The base on which the three figures stand on the Sowing the Seeds represents the passage of time. Nearby is the Nikwasi Mound, which is a cultural and spiritual center of the Cherokee Nation. The WHT sculpture is less than a block away. The seeds shown in the hands of the women within the sculpture represent the importance of agriculture but also symbolize the transfer of knowledge across cultures and generations. A basket of corn is at the feet of the women. The hands of the women are touching, illustrating the ideal of a sisterhood of women that can help bridge cultural divides.

The details of each figure reflect specific elements of each woman's culture and the place in history and society each woman held. The sculpture is a metaphor for the evolution of modern society, a narrative about three local women, as well as a history lesson with embedded historically accurate details. It is intended to acknowledge and celebrate women's contributions, to inspire future generations of girls and women to pursue their dreams and to challenge all to learn from the past and aspire for a more equitable future.

"I can say without hesitation these determined ladies from the Women's History Trail Organization did an absolutely amazing job in raising half a million dollars to create, commission, and construct what I, and many consider a priceless work of art, while at the same time identifying and promoting the values that contribute to our culture, heritage, and history.

continues on page 38



The process started with the vision of one person and gradually grew to include the entire community. This project will be a focal point for our town for many years and I believe that some will plan a visit to Franklin for the primary purpose of viewing this inspirational work of art.

» **Jack Horton**, Mayor, Franklin

continued from page 37

“It exemplifies the dedication and sacrifice that women have made from pioneer days to today through their hard work, dedication and perseverance to create and maintain a common bond that we all have in protecting and promoting our beautiful and majestic part of the world. I sincerely hope that this is just the beginning of similar community projects that raise the consciousness of our citizens and visitors in the fact it demonstrates the unique history and culture we may often take for granted,” Franklin Mayor Jack Horton said.

The WHT leadership team raised \$600,000 from donors, local government and tourism organizations. The team says its goal continues to “empower and inspire girls and women to forge ahead and follow their dreams for the future.” It took five years. The women prevailed.

The WHT’s website invites and encourages visitors and locals to visit the park to “experience their history in a deeper, more personal way giving a greater sense of identity to these women and their contributions to Franklin and Macon County’s heritage.”

“The process started with the vision of one person and gradually grew to include the entire community. This project will be a focal point for our town for many years and I believe that some will plan a visit to Franklin for the primary purpose of viewing this inspirational work of art,” Horton said.

The sculpture was donated to the Town of Franklin as public art by the WHT. ■

Bob Scott is a former Franklin Mayor and former chair of the NC Mayor’s Association. He is a freelance writer, columnist, and photographer.



ADVANCING MUNICIPAL LEADERS

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

FALL 2024 | DATE & LOCATION LIST

August 7 | Youngsville, NC

- Council Academy: Fundamentals for Elected Officials
- Rules of Procedure: Legal Basics for Municipal Governing Boards

August 15 | Brevard, NC

- HR 101: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Employee Management
- Rules of Procedure: Legal Basics for Municipal Governing Boards

August 29 | New Bern, NC

- HR 101: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Employee Management
- Rules of Procedure: Legal Basics for Municipal Governing Boards

Sept. 4 | Online

- Cyber Security 101

Sept. 12 | Indian Trail, NC

- HR 101: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Employee Management
- Municipal Supervisory Basics

Sept. 26 | Lewisville, NC

- HR 101: A Comprehensive Overview of Municipal Employee Management
- The 10 Keys to Municipal Finance

Oct. 17 | Online

- Commit to Civility

Oct. 23 | Boiling Springs, NC

- Council Academy: Fundamentals for Elected Officials
- The 10 Keys to Municipal Finance

Nov. 4 | Online

- Cyber Security 101

Nov. 7 | Carrboro, NC

- Municipal Supervisory Basics
- The 10 Keys to Municipal Finance

Nov. 14 | Williamston, NC

- Excellence in Municipal Customer Service

Nov. 20-21 | Raleigh, NC

- Small Town Strategic Planning Workshop



ARP Obligation Deadline Looms Ahead

STEPHANIE HUGHES

Communications & Multimedia Strategist (ARP)

WITH THE ARP GRANT DEADLINE OF DECEMBER 31, 2024, APPROACHING, MUNICIPALITIES MUST OBLIGATE FUNDS THROUGH A GRANT PROJECT ORDINANCE TO AVOID RETURNING THEM. NCLM'S MAS TEAM AIDS TOWNS IN COMPLIANCE, SOFTWARE, FINANCIAL SERVICES, AND OTHER TECHNICAL HELP.

Since the passing of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) in 2021, municipalities have been busy working to invest these unprecedented funds in their communities and learning the necessary steps to stay in compliance with how these federal dollars can be spent and how they must be reported.

We are nearing the first deadline of the ARP grants on **December 31, 2024**, by which date all funds must be obligated through the passing of a Grant Project Ordinance (GPO) by the town's board. Once the obligation deadline has passed, all ARP funds that are not properly obligated under the ARP Regulations will have to be returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Funds are considered obligated when towns have entered into a legal commitment, executed contracts, issued purchase orders

to vendors, or hired employees. The simplest method to obligate funds is through the option of revenue replacement that goes towards benefits and salaries for town employees. Towns can allocate up to \$10 million in revenue replacement. In this situation, once the board adopts the GPO, the funds are considered both obligated and expended.

To adopt this GPO, the board must identify the specific prior expenditures they are designating for reimbursement and the dates the original expenditures were made. Under the regulations, governmental expenditures made after March 3, 2021, can be included in your GPO before the deadline of December 31, 2024.

To avoid any towns needing to return funds, the League has been working with local government officials to confirm all necessary steps have been taken to properly obligate and expend ARP funds. If your town is unsure whether all necessary steps have been completed, or if you need assistance with passing a GPO, please contact the League at MAS@nclm.org to request a meeting with one of our field representatives.

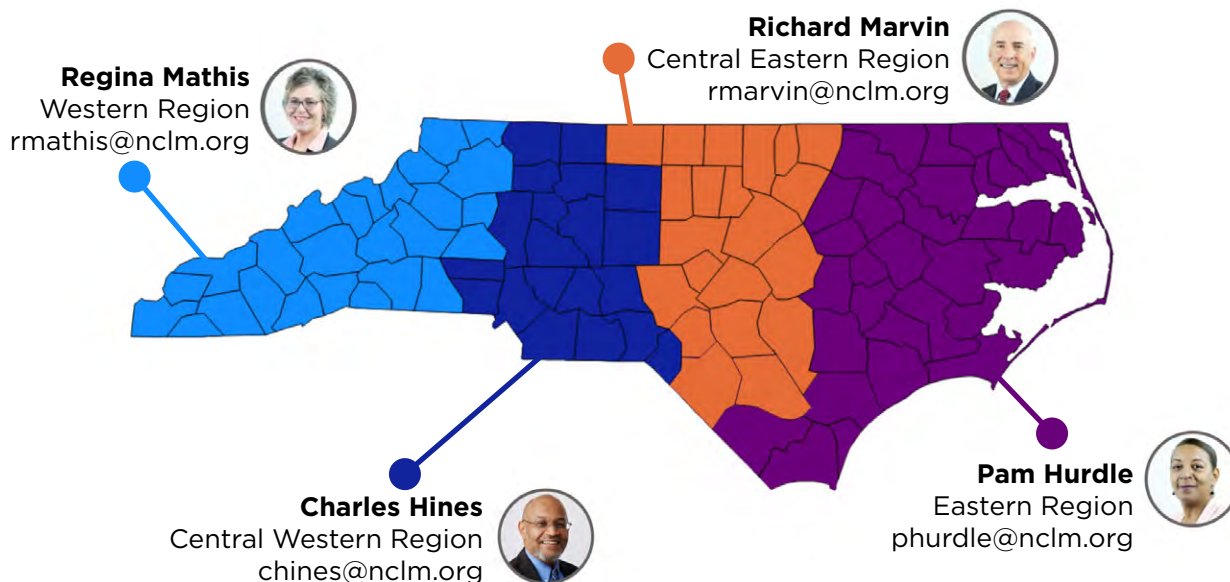
NCLM'S ARP TEAM TRANSITIONS TO MAS TEAM

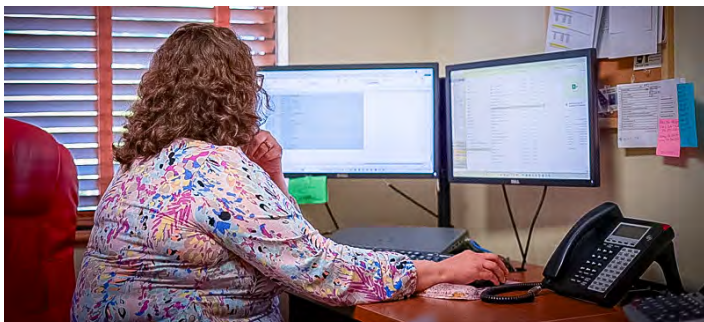
As towns across the state are becoming more proficient in obligating, spending, and reporting their use of ARP funds, the League's American Rescue Plan (ARP) team is transitioning to become the Municipal Accounting Services (MAS) team. We feel this change in name will better reflect the work we are currently doing.

The North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) generously provided funds to the N.C. League of Municipalities out of the General Assembly's own ARP allotment and tasked the League with providing technical assistance to municipalities as they work

continues on page 42

MAS FIELD REPRESENTATIVES: REGIONAL MAP





NCLM MAS **SERVICE LINE** **OFFERINGS**

Software Conversion: Intended for towns that could benefit from a more robust financial software, the League covers the cost of moving financial accounts over to a custom-tailored software suite specifically designed for small-town government.

Accounting Mentorship: For towns that desire financial training and assistance, but are not positioned for a software conversion, the League offers an accounting mentorship program with the goal of improving fiscal health.

Cybersecurity: The League provides cyber assessment and gap analysis, recommendations and quarterly touchpoints for improvement, plus individualized consulting to help protect local governments against cybersecurity threats.

Grant Writing: For towns interested in securing funding but need assistance with grant identification or the application process, the League provides support with project development, application preparation and submission, and general grant management.

Legal Assistance: The League connects towns with qualified legal advice for property acquisition, request for proposal development, policy and internal control development, as well as individualized legal guidance based on the towns' needs.

Communications: Every town has a story to tell. The League works with towns to develop communication skills, including press release writing and distribution, engaging with elected officials, and learning how to best share the story of the town.

General Compliance Assistance: For towns that have not yet obligated funds, need assistance with choosing eligible projects or desire support with annual reporting and compliance, the League has field representatives across the state who are available to work with towns on the needs specific to their situation.

Our experience has been nothing short of remarkable simply because this program allows us to go after ... funding in a way that we were not aware of. [It] puts us in a situation where we have a stronger platform to meet the needs of our residents. That is the power of this because **we are now being put in a position to better serve the public in a way that does not kill the general fund.**

» Chancer McLaughlin, Town Manager, Town of Hope Mills



continued from page 40

through the needed steps for staying in compliance with the U.S. Treasury. Out of that mandate, the League has assembled a team of experts to support towns with what they need to successfully invest these funds in their communities. These experts have spent the months since working with towns by providing financial services through software conversion and one-on-one accounting training and mentorship, ARP compliance guidance, and other service lines that are designed to support towns through assistance and resources.

As a result of the initial investment from the NCGA, the League has put together a robust offering of training and resources that are set to extend the reach of ARP funds far beyond the amounts originally received by individual municipalities. Today, towns are seeing the results of these services through access to improved software and specialized expertise in a variety of areas.

The Town of Hope Mills, under the direction of town manager Chancer McLaughlin, has taken advantage of the League's grant writing services. The town is seeking grant funding to meet its fire department's needs for updated equipment and vehicle repairs or purchases. McLaughlin shared that the program has not only helped them write compelling grant applications but has opened the door to apply for other grants that they would not have known about otherwise.

"Our experience has been nothing short of remarkable simply because this program allows us to go after ... funding in a way that we were not aware of," McLaughlin said. "[It] puts us in a situation where we have a stronger platform to meet the needs of our residents. That is the power of this because we are now being put in a position to better serve the public in a way that does not kill the general fund."

In Castalia, the town has recently completed a full financial software conversion. Town clerk and finance officer, Tracy Shearin, shared how the conversion has gone beyond simply adopting a better software system, and how the mentorship and training have given her confidence in doing her job well and in having a support system in place for when questions arise.

"I love that they are teaching me why. Not just how, but why. And they are willing to explain it," Shearin said. "I have had to learn, and I never had instruction before, ... so to benefit from the knowledge of people that do understand and that have the capability of helping you understand benefits everybody. I feel confident in what I am doing simply because I have confidence in who is helping me learn it." ■



The League is excited to continue partnering with towns to provide these valuable services and resources. For more details about our Municipal Accounting Services, please visit our website: <https://www.nclm.org/member-services/financial-operational-consulting/municipal-accounting-services/>



On PFAS, Will Polluter Pay?

SCOTT MOONEYHAM

Director of Political Communication and Coordination

AS NEW EPA RULES ON PFAS REGULATION EMERGE, NORTH CAROLINA DEBATES WHO SHOULD BEAR CLEANUP COSTS. NCLM URGES CONGRESS FOR LIABILITY PROTECTION AND FUNDING, AS STATE LEGISLATION TARGETS PFAS MANUFACTURERS FOR REMEDIATION COSTS.

Who will ultimately pay to clean up PFAS contamination has become an increasing focus of policymakers at the state and federal level after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently released new rules regarding regulation of the chemicals.

North Carolina has become a ground-zero when it comes to public debate regarding how to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), including GenX, after the discovery of extensive contamination of the Cape Fear River in the southeastern part of the state. Chemours, along with its former parent company DuPont, has produced the chemicals at its plant near Fayetteville and has been blamed for much of the pollution. The chemicals are used in the production of medical devices, weatherproof products, firefighting foam and cooking pans.

Last year, Chemours, DuPont and another firm, Corteva, announced that they would pay over \$1 billion to settle claims regarding these so-called forever chemicals, but many more lawsuits remain pending. Meanwhile, the EPA this spring issued new rules regulating PFAS as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), with pollution limits for drinking water that could create huge costs for public water drinking utilities.

Against that backdrop, N.C. League of Municipalities Executive Director Rose Williams wrote to members of North Carolina's congressional delegation in May to urge that they consider the effects of the ruling on the municipal and regional water utilities that will have to meet treatment requirements.

"Without action from Congress, these final rules have huge cost and liability implications for local governments, their utilities and local taxpayers and ratepayers," Williams wrote. "While Congress has made funding available through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and other programs to address PFAS and other emerging contaminants, this funding will likely cover only a fraction of the costs and potential liability for municipalities under the strict liability requirements of CERCLA."

Williams went on to note that "many North Carolina water utilities are run by smaller towns with limited ratepayer bases." She urged North Carolina's members of Congress to pass additional funding now under consideration but to also provide liability protection to utilities.

"These entities have been passive receivers of these pollutants, and without liability protection, costs will be shifted from manufacturers to local taxpayers," she wrote.

At the state level, North Carolina legislators are again considering legislation that would force manufacturers to repay any remediation costs of water utilities required to treat PFAS, whether one-time equipment or ongoing treatment.

While similar legislation failed to pass in 2022, the latest bill, HB 864 PFAS Pollution and Polluter Liability, clearly focuses on PFAS manufacturers and not companies that have used the chemicals in their processes and goods. At a House committee hearing in June, Rep. Ted Davis of New Hanover County, a bill co-sponsor, said that he considers the legislation "good for business."

"This legislation is not anti-business. It is about protecting us and our drinking water and the (utility) ratepayer," Davis said.

Businesses, especially in communities with large manufacturers, can make up a significant percentage of the ratepayer base for local public water utilities. As such, they could be forced to pick up a significant portion of treatment costs if state or federal policy does not dictate a "polluter pays" principle.

"The people right now who are on the hook ... their rates have to go up to pay for the equipment," Davis said. "It's not fair for the ratepayer to have to pay the bill."

The League's Government Affairs team is closely following the legislation and was prepared to speak in support at the June hearing but was unable to do so due to the time limitations of the meeting.

But in comments that did show the potential for the huge costs for utilities and their ratepayers, John Nichols, director of Brunswick Public Utilities, said that utility had already paid \$170 million for equipment to treat PFAS and spends nearly \$3 million a year in ongoing costs.

Even for utilities that have already spent money on PFAS treatment, the new EPA rules have the potential to raise those costs.

While it is unclear whether the latest state legislation will pass into law this year, the issue of who pays and who owns liability for PFAS contamination is not going away, either at either the state or federal legislative level, or in the courts.

The League will continue to closely follow these issues regarding PFAS contamination and advocate on behalf of member cities and towns for policies that don't leave local utilities and their ratepayers footing the bill. ■



TAKING THE FIELD

Reflecting on a Summer of Insight



ROSE VAUGHN WILLIAMS
NCLM Executive Director

As the days of summer come to a close, I find myself reflecting on the vibrant energy and invaluable insights shared during our recent affiliate group conferences. These gatherings have always been more than just meetings—they are opportunities for League members to connect, learn, and strengthen our collective mission of serving our communities better.

With multiple conferences hosted across the state of North Carolina, our affiliate groups have once again proven to be the heartbeats of innovation and collaboration. The NC Government Finance Officers Association gathered finance employees and other experts to explore their best next steps to ensure financial health and stability. North Carolina Black Elected Municipal Officials joined together in Durham to learn about affordable housing, legislative happenings and resiliency in changing environments. The NC Association of Municipal Attorneys conference delved into legal challenges facing municipalities today, changes in laws, and shared knowledge with each other so they are best prepared to represent our cities and towns. And finally, the NC Association of Municipal Clerks explored the power of how one person can make a true difference.

You are at the heart of these conferences, our local leaders. Your dedication and commitment to enhancing the quality of life in our municipalities inspire us all. It is through your participation and engagement that these gatherings become fertile ground for new ideas and strategies that shape the future of our communities.

I must also extend my gratitude to our incredible League and town staff who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure

these events run smoothly. Their attention to detail and passion for supporting our membership are exceptional.

Looking ahead, let us carry forward the momentum. Let's implement the lessons learned, leverage the connections made, and continue striving for excellence in municipal governance. Together, we are not only catalysts for positive change but also a strong, united voice advocating for our communities' needs.

Stay engaged with our League's initiatives and resources. Your active involvement makes a meaningful difference in our collective advocacy efforts.

As we transition into the fall season, I encourage you to attend upcoming Advancing Municipal Leaders (AML) courses and earn an AML Certificate of Municipal Achievement (12 credit hours), a Certificate of Municipal Excellence (25 credit hours), or a Certificate of Municipal Dedication (40 credit hours).

Also consider specializing your learning by completing an AML Financial Management Certificate, a Diversity, Inclusion, and Racial Equity for Cities and Towns (DIRECT) Certificate, or a Commit to Civility Certificate.

These courses and certifications are tailored specifically for municipal leaders like you. Your participation will not only benefit your personal and professional growth but will also contribute to the overall strength and resilience of our municipalities.

Thank you for your unwavering dedication to our municipalities and for making our summer conferences a resounding success. Here's to a productive and inspiring season ahead! ■

You are at the heart of these conferences, our local leaders. **Your dedication and commitment to enhancing the quality of life in our municipalities inspire us all.**



NC Association of Municipal Clerks summer conference in Charlotte, NC.



NCLM President Mark-Anthony Middleton and Rose Vaughn Williams at the NC Government Finance Officers summer conference in Wilmington, NC.



NC Black Elected Municipal Officials summer conference in Chapel Hill, NC.

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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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