

SOUTHERN CITY

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA LEAGUE OF MUNICIPALITIES



Town & State Regional Dinners Return

Allowing municipal leaders to break bread with the legislators in their districts



Save *faster* with a Money Market Account

Set your savings up for success with a Money Market Account from Civic. Earn higher dividends than a traditional savings account at 2.05% APY,¹ with no restrictions, and access your money anytime. It's the best of both worlds.

Want to make the most of your savings? Deposit your tax refund into a Civic Money Market Account and watch your balance grow. You can access the funds when you need them, so you're in control.

Get in on the savings. Open a Money Market Account with Civic at civicro.org/money-market.

OPEN TODAY



civicro.org/money-market

Federally insured by NCUA

¹ APY = Annual Percentage Yield. Minimum deposit of \$250 to open account and earn dividends. Dividends compounded daily and paid monthly. Service fee of \$2 each month balance is below \$250.

² All calls are recorded.

civicro.org | 844-772-4842²

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



For more than 100 years, the N.C. League of Municipalities has been one voice for cities and towns working for a better North Carolina.



Build Your Strategic Plan with the School of Government



School of
Government

Using practical, data-informed approaches, the **Strategic Planning and Performance Management (SPPM)** program assists public-sector leaders in aligning priorities, engaging stakeholders, and tracking key metrics.

Through a collaborative 12-month process, our faculty experts will work with your team to develop a comprehensive strategic and performance management plan that will guide your organization for the next five years and beyond.

PLAN WITH CONFIDENCE.

Scan the QR code or visit go.unc.edu/SPPM to learn more.



N•FOCUS

Local Government Services

**Planning Based on
Real World
Challenges, Goals & Objectives**

- ✓ Unified Development Ordinances
- ✓ Zoning Audits / Testing
- ✓ Comprehensive Land Use Plans
- ✓ Master Plans
- ✓ Nuisance Ordinances
- ✓ Code Administration / Enforcement
- ✓ Interim Public Administration

Contact: Patti Radar, Manager / COO

704.933.0772

PRadar@NFocusPlanning.org

Advertise Here

Visit www.lpicommunities.com/advertising-solutions

Scan
to get
started



16

The Constant is Change



Inside This Issue

10



14



20



SOUTHERN CITY

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

1st Quarter 2026 / Vol. 76 / No. 1

Executive Director & Publisher: Rose Vaughn Williams / **Editor:** Isabella Mormando / **Writers:** Ben Brown, Stephanie Hughes, Isabella Mormando, Ben Mount / **Photography:** Ben Brown, Stephanie Hughes, Isabella Mormando / **Art Direction:** Johnny Randle III / **Design:** Leslie Yount

10 **Take Advantage of the Advancing Municipal Leaders Program**

The League continues to strength its AML training, offering fiscal trainings, relevant CityVision sessions and on-demand courses to support newly elected municipal leaders and staff statewide.

14 **Five Legal Topics Elected Officials Should Know**

Whether you are newly elected, an experienced incumbent, or someone appointed to fill a vacancy, it is important to understand these five legal frameworks that shape what a municipal governing board does.

16 **The Constant is Change**

Winston-Salem Councilman Robert Clark discusses the speed of markets, competition and local readiness.

20 **Town & State Regional Dinners Return**

The 2026 Town & State Dinners, already underway, again take on a regional format, allowing municipal leaders to break bread with the legislators in their districts.

22 **League Program Empowers Towns with Stronger Financial Management**

Recognizing the need for stronger, more consistent financial support, the League sought a way to walk alongside towns to help strengthen operations and build a solid fiscal foundation.

THROUGHLINES

6 **Board of Directors**

8 **Speaking Out: A Moment of Personal Privilege**

26 **Taking the Field: A New Chapter for North Carolina's Cities & Towns**

28 **Risk Management Board of Trustees**

31 **In Memoriam**

WRITERS THIS ISSUE



Ben Brown
Communications &
Multimedia Strategist



Stephanie Hughes
Communications &
Multimedia Strategist
(ARP)



Isabella Mormando
Communications &
Multimedia Strategist



Ben Mount
Senior Assistant
General Counsel

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

Phone: 919-715-4000 / nclm.org

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

Advertising:



Advertising Sales: Mark Hiller,
mhiller@4lpi.com

©2026 N.C. League of Municipalities
All rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced by any means, in whole or in part, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

PUBLISHED SPRING 2026

2025-2026 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



PRESIDENT
Martha Sue Hall
Mayor Pro Tem, Albemarle



FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT
Jody McLeod
Mayor, Clayton



SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT
Satish Garimella
Mayor Pro Tem, Morrisville



DISTRICT 1
Mayor Elizabeth Morey
Southern Shores



AT-LARGE
Mayor Dennis Barber
Newport



DURHAM
Mayor
Leonardo Williams



DISTRICT 2
Mayor Sharon Harker
Beaufort



AT-LARGE
Council Member
Ann Schneider
Oak Ridge



FAYETTEVILLE
Mayor
Mitch Colvin



DISTRICT 3
Mayor Terry Mann
Whiteville



AT-LARGE
Mayor Dwight Lake
Mayodan



GREENSBORO
Council Member
Tammi Thurm



DISTRICT 4
Mayor PJ Connelly
Greenville



MANAGER
City Manager
Tasha Logan Ford
High Point



RALEIGH
Mayor Pro Tem
Stormie Forte



DISTRICT 5
Council Member TJ Walker
Rocky Mount



MANAGER
City Manager
Michael Peoples
Gastonia



WINSTON-SALEM
Council Member
Robert Clark



DISTRICT 6
Mayor Jessica Day
Knightsdale



MANAGER
City Manager
Jonathan Russell
Robersonville



PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT
Mayor Brittany Bernhardt
Granite Quarry



DISTRICT 7
Council Member
Mary Jo Adams
Laurinburg



CLERK
Municipal Clerk
Brenda Blanco
New Bern



PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT
Mayor Joe Gibbons
Lenoir



DISTRICT 11
Mayor Hayley Beaty
Dallas



ATTORNEY
City Attorney
Emanuel McGirt
Greenville



PRESIDENTIAL APPOINTMENT
Mayor Neville Hall
Eden



DISTRICT 12
Mayor Zeb Smathers
Canton



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Rose Vaughn Williams
NCLM



Working as one. Advancing all.

CityVision

RALEIGH MAY 5-7 2026

Join us at the Raleigh Convention Center for CityVision 2026!

You won't want to miss the opportunity to connect with hundreds of municipal leaders and local government partners during 3 days of educational sessions, networking events, and exploring all that the capital city has to offer!

For more information, visit the CityVision webpage at
nclm.org/cityvision.

MAY 5 - 7, 2026

REGISTER NOW!





SPEAKING OUT

A Moment of Personal Privilege

Protecting Our Children from the Growing Threat of Vaping

Martha Sue Hall, NCLM President

Serving on the North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force has been one of the most meaningful roles of my career. This 35-member body operates during the legislative session and works tirelessly to make data-driven recommendations to the North Carolina General Assembly for informed statute and policy making. Our mission is clear: Protect children and prevent fatalities through sound policy.

The Task Force is divided into three subcommittees, including the Unintentional Death Committee, which I am honored to co-chair—it's where my heart is.

Over the years, I've seen firsthand how policy can save lives; initiatives like North Carolina's graduated driver's license began here. Today, one of the most urgent issues we face is youth access to tobacco and cannabis products, including vaping devices.

Through this work, I've learned just how pervasive this problem has become. I recently met a courageous young woman named Dabney Ferris from Wake County. At just 15, all she needed was money and transportation to get THC and vaping products. She became addicted to vaping cannabis, struggled through treatment, and is now clean. Today, she shares her story to educate policymakers and peers, which serves as a powerful reminder of what's at stake.

Unfortunately, Dabney's story is not unique. We have kids as young as fifth grade selling vapes at school, and many 12- to 15-year-olds are hooked. Schools confiscate devices daily. The consequences are real: chronic cough, declining grades, and disrupted learning environments. Some schools have resorted to locking bathrooms to curb vaping.

So why is this happening? As you are most likely aware in your own communities, vapes are seemingly everywhere. There are no regulations for shop locations or the products sold inside them, which include tobacco and THC items. Anyone can walk in—carding is inconsistent. Further, the packaging is very eye-catching and marketed at younger consumers,

with many products packaged to look nearly identical to well-known brands of candy.

While our hands are often tied as municipal officials, I believe it's important to educate ourselves about the public health issues facing our communities. That's why I hope you'll join me at CityVision this May 6-7, at the Raleigh Convention Center, for a workshop that dives deeper into the research and work that my colleagues and I at the Child Fatality Task Force are advancing. From education grows understanding, concern and ultimately action. I want our communities to be safe for my grandchildren and yours. If not us, then who will protect these kids? <<

“Our mission is clear: Protect children and prevent fatalities through sound policy.”

» Martha Sue Hall, NCLM President

MUNICIPAL EQUATION



WHAT'S BEEN YOUR FAVORITE RECENT EPISODE OF MUNICIPAL EQUATION?

The League's long-running podcast has covered a lot over the years, with and for member cities and towns: local history, economic development, communication innovations, verging technologies, police issues, branding, and so much more. Earlier this year, we looked at the housing affordability conversation (with guest Wilmington Mayor Bill Saffo) and, in another episode, laid out the important basics and interesting quirks of the state's public records law (with guest Baxter Wells, an attorney at the League).

Data centers, open meetings requirements and other municipal matters both verging and legacy are also on the episode list, thanks to your feedback and suggestions. We're always listening for ideas and topics to discuss on Municipal Equation, which we produce in video and audio-only formats and release monthly through our 'Need To Know' newsletter. You can also find it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other mainstream listening services. Contact host Ben Brown at bbrown@nclm.org.

**LISTEN
HERE:**



Take Advantage of the Advancing Municipal Leaders Program

Stephanie Hughes
Communications & Multimedia
Strategist (ARP)

In 2026, many communities across North Carolina are welcoming a new class of elected leaders, following the recent municipal elections. Many mayors and council members are taking office for the first time, and some seasoned officials are stepping into new roles with different responsibilities. While fresh perspectives are a strength of local government, transitions of this scale underscore the need for support, shared knowledge and strong educational networks.



“Transitions of this scale underscore the need for support, shared knowledge and strong educational networks.”

Many elected officials are learning the complexities of municipal governance at the same time—some for the first time—while balancing public expectations, legal responsibilities and important decisions that affect their communities’ future. Even the most experienced leaders benefit from continued education as policies, statutes and best practices continue to evolve. This is where the League’s Advancing Municipal Leader (AML) program plays a critical role.

The League’s AML program is designed to equip elected officials and municipal staff with the knowledge, tools and connections they need to lead effectively from day one. By utilizing AML resources, League members invest not only in their own leadership development but also in the stability of municipal government across North Carolina.

Spring Educational Sessions

This spring, the League is offering multiple opportunities for continuing education. Across central and eastern North Carolina, three comprehensive fiscal training sessions will provide hands-on guidance in municipal financial management. Attendees can earn six AML credits and six CPE credits, with AML credits also counting toward the NCLM Financial Management Certification Level I—a practical way to build skills and advance professional credentials.

CityVision 2026 returns to Raleigh in May, where participants can earn up to four AML credits through a robust lineup of concurrent sessions, along with an additional credit available through the general session. Over three days, attendees will learn from experts, explore new strategies for local governance, and engage with peers from across the state. Key themes will include disaster preparedness and leadership, as well as timely topics such as regionalization and practical communications training. Whether it’s deepening knowledge, earning AML credits, or

building relationships, these in-person opportunities provide valuable experiences for municipal professionals at every stage of their careers.

On-Demand Opportunities

Finding time for training can be a challenge for municipal officials balancing full schedules and evolving responsibilities; to better meet members where they are, the League continues to expand its library of on-demand courses—flexible training opportunities that can be completed anytime, at a pace that fits individual needs.



Scan QR code
for all AML on-demand
courses

In 2026, Advancing Municipal Leaders launched three new on-demand courses in the Foundations of Municipal Governance series. Designed to help towns build strong operational foundations, these

courses provide practical guidance on effective, ethical and transparent local government. Participants gain a clearer understanding of essential topics such as managing municipal assets, complying with public accountability requirements and making informed decisions in accordance with North Carolina statutes. Each course offers one AML credit.

Current courses in the series include:

- Real Estate & Condemnation
- Open Meetings Law
- Public Records

The League has also expanded its on-demand offerings in municipal finance, now providing a full slate of nine courses covering core financial management topics—from understanding financial reports to preparing for an audit. These courses are designed to support staff at varying levels of experience and

continues on next page



Left: Members at a recent AML training. Above: NCLM's Carla Obiol with Conway Mayor Lee Duke at an AIM dinner.

responsibility, each providing one AML credit, applicable toward NCLM Financial Management Certification Level I requirements.

Municipal Finance course topics include:

- Accounting for non-governmental accountants
- Bank reconciliations
- How to read financial reports
- Monthly board meetings
- Cash receipts
- Pre-audit preparation
- Completing required forms
- Internal controls
- Roles and responsibilities

Ethical conduct is important as an elected municipal official. Because of its importance, the North Carolina General Assembly mandates that municipal elected officials receive a minimum of two clock hours of ethics education within 12 months of being elected or appointed to office. AML's on-demand ethics course helps municipal officials meet the mandated requirement and provides an overview of the laws and regulations that govern ethical behavior in North Carolina.

In addition, the League now offers an Accounting Instruction & Mentorship (AIM) Training Certificate for

participants who have completed a full year of training using the League's AIM Manual. This certificate is available exclusively to members participating in the Municipal Accounting Services program for mentorship or new software implementation.

Together, these new on-demand courses reflect the League's continued commitment to providing practical, accessible training that supports local officials at every stage of their professional development. <<



Scan QR code
to explore current
AML offerings

Left: Town of Red Springs finance officer attending an AIM dinner. Below: [Left] Kia Anthony, Spring Lake Mayor, and [Right] Dwight Lake, Mayodan Mayor, receive the Certificate of Municipal Achievement at CityVision 2025.



MUNICIPAL FINANCE: COMPREHENSIVE FISCAL TRAINING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Everything you need to know about municipal finance

This training is meant for all local government leaders—elected officials, managers, finance directors, and more—and is designed to be a one-stop shop for municipal financial education. Whether you are new to your role or a seasoned veteran of local government, this course will provide you with the foundational tools and best practices to make an immediate difference in your town.

Upcoming Locations & Dates

Clayton | March 18

Morehead City | April 7

Leland | April 14

Cost

This full-day training is offered for just \$40 thanks to support from the Camber Foundation.

Learning Objectives

- Review significant requirements of the North Carolina Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act per General Statutes, Chapter 159
- Recognize the importance of compliance with the Fiscal Control Act in achieving a sustainable financial management system
- Recognize the importance of good stewardship of taxpayer funds
- Identify how the roles of municipal administrative officials and elected board members relate to each other and to financial operations
- Explain the importance of following best practices to achieve fiscal health
- Review 10 practical keys to a board or management's oversight of their financial management program



REGISTER NOW
with QR code or visit
www.nclm.org/AML.

Contact us at
learning@nclm.org
for more info.



Five Legal Topics Elected Officials Should Know

Ben Mount

Senior Assistant General Counsel

Whether you are newly elected, an experienced incumbent, or someone appointed to fill a vacancy, it is important to understand the legal framework that shapes what a municipal governing board does. Below are five legal topics every elected official should know—remember, always check with your town attorney or the League's Legal team with questions.

1. Know Your Authority: The Town Charter and Core Statutes

Understanding the source of your town's legal authority, and its limits, is essential. Your town's charter establishes its name, form of government, governing board structure, and terms of office. A town may amend its charter without approval from the North Carolina General Assembly in limited situations¹.

Another source of authority is the North Carolina General Statutes. Two core statutes are important for elected officials: Chapter 160A (municipal governance and operations) and Chapter 160D (planning and land use). These statutes, along with your charter, are available at www.ncleg.gov.

2. Ethics and Conflicts of Interest

State law requires elected or appointed officials to complete at least two hours of ethics training within 12 months of taking office², and the League offers both on-demand and in-person ethics training through the Advancing Municipal Leaders program.

Every municipality must adopt a code of ethics, which should, at minimum, address an official's duty to obey the law, uphold the integrity and independence of the office, avoid impropriety, faithfully perform official duties, and conduct public business openly³.

Board members have a duty to vote unless a conflict of interest exists⁴.

Conflicts may exist when an official derives personal benefit from an official decision. Violating conflicts of interest rules can derail meetings, undermine the public's trust, and in some cases, result in criminal penalties.

3. Open Meetings and Public Records

Transparency laws apply to official meetings of a majority of the board and to records made or received in the transaction of public business. The Open Meetings Law⁵ requires meetings to be open to the public, properly noticed, and documented through meeting minutes. Boards can enter closed sessions, but only for purposes authorized by statute⁶.

Officials should be cautious about simultaneous communications between a majority of the board, including emails and text messages sent to and from personal devices. If the messages involve public business, they may violate the Open Meetings Law and be subject to disclosure under the Public Records Law. Under the Public Records Law, the public has

a right to inspect and obtain copies of public records, including paper and electronic records, recordings, films, videos, and photographs, unless a statutory exception applies.

4. Public Meetings and Meeting Procedures

It's important to know the distinct types of public meetings.

- **Regular meetings** follow a set schedule with public notice.
- **Special meetings** can be called as needed but require at least 48 hours' notice and are limited to the stated purpose of the meeting.
- **Emergency meetings** are reserved for unforeseen circumstances requiring immediate action and have reduced notice requirements, though notice should be provided as soon as practicable.

A quorum is the minimum number of members who must be physically present to conduct official business⁷. The mayor serves as presiding officer and keeps order during the meeting, assuming that a quorum has been established.

“A commitment to seeking guidance from staff, counsel and organizations like the League will help you serve your community and strengthen public trust in local government.”

» Ben Mount, Senior Assistant General Counsel



Above: NCLM's Ben Mount at recent League training for elected municipal officials.

Public hearings are typically limited to specific matters, such as budgets or zoning ordinances. In contrast, public comment periods allow broader feedback from the public on a wider range of issues. Boards may adopt reasonable time, place, and manner limits on public participation, but they must respect constitutional free speech rights.

5. Budget and Finances

The Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act⁸ governs municipal budgeting and financial

administration; it requires each town to appoint a budget officer, adopt a balanced budget, meet statutory deadlines, follow generally accepted accounting principles, and undergo an independent annual audit.

Many resources exist to help local governments meet their financial obligations, including the Local Government Commission within the Office of State Treasurer, and the League's Municipal Accounting Services and Accounting Instruction & Mentorship programs.

These five legal topics form the foundation of effective municipal governance. A commitment to seeking guidance from staff, counsel, and organizations like the League will help you serve your community and strengthen public trust in local government. <<

¹ See G.S. § 160A-101. ² See G.S. § 160A-87. ³ See G.S. § 160A-86. ⁴ See G.S. § 160A-75. ⁵ Chapter 143, Article 33C of the North Carolina General Statutes. ⁶ See G.S. §143-318.11. ⁷ See G.S. §160A-74. ⁸ Chapter 159, Article 3 of the North Carolina General Statutes.



Started in 1918, Rivers has become a leading civil and environmental engineering firm in North Carolina. Our varied client base, from large scale commercial and institutional development to intricate public utilities, public works infrastructure projects, and downtown master plans and streetscapes are all a testament to our attention to detail and commitment to quality.

252-752-4135 • riversandassociates.com

**A CENTURY OF
ENGINEERING, LAND DEVELOPMENT,
GEOMATICS/SURVEYING AND
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE SERVICES**



The Constant is Change

Winston-Salem Councilman Robert Clark Discusses the Speed of Markets, Competition & Local Readiness

Ben Brown

Communications & Multimedia
Strategist



Above: Robert Clark, Winston-Salem City Councilman and NCLM Board of Directors Member.

Public office is constantly compelling. Fifty years ago, 20 years ago, five years ago, now—it's hard to find a period absent of changeful issues for government. For City Councilman Robert Clark of Winston-Salem, 25 years of elected municipal service has shown the array—population changes, economic seas both smooth and stormy, business closures and recruitments, political shifts and social movements, housing and affordability conversations, a pandemic and plenty more to list—informing a sense of what to be ready for and how local it can all be.

Not as local as demand for, say, curbside leaf collection—"I get more calls on that than anything," Clark noted—but it all adds up for the growing city of roughly 255,000 people, currently North Carolina's fifth-biggest municipality.

Southern City visited with Clark, a League Board of Directors member, at Winston-Salem City Hall in December for a look back on his local service to date and how he's seen the city evolve

over his lifetime, how he's appreciated the opportunity to help navigate the large and small, and what he's reading in the tea leaves—or tobacco leaves, as might be more appropriate for the community historically nicknamed "Camel City."

"I take a lot of satisfaction in helping folks that may be running into issues in their day-to-day lives," said Clark, who represents the city's predominantly residential West Ward. He joined the

city council in 2001 but is essentially a lifetime resident, having moved to Winston-Salem at a young age, when his family relocated from South Carolina in the mid 1960s—a decade that saw the start of broadly influenced economic transitions.

"Winston-Salem in the '80s and '90s, and even into this century, we had some tough economic news," Clark said while describing the city's powerhouse past in textiles and

tobacco and the shifting nature of any industry. For tobacco, the popularity of smoking products began rolling back in the '60s, eventually felt in Winston-Salem, where tobacco leader R.J. Reynolds had been founded in the late 1800s, employing thousands of locals at a time into the 20th century before the headquarters moved out of town and area factories closed in the 1980s. HanesBrands and Wachovia were among other major employers whose footprints shifted or decreased.

"There really was a need to transition our economy from what had taken us through the previous 100 years to what's going to take us into the next 100 years," Clark said. "And I felt like we needed a local government that would be pro-economic development and would be a partner with the private sector into transforming our economy from what it was into what it will be."

Like other Triad cities in transition, Winston-Salem began marketing its assets and talents to companies looking for sites and in 2004 announced a big recruitment with Dell computer manufacturing. "It made the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, because every city wanted Dell," Clark said. "It proved that we have a good product to sell here, and if we work hard at it, we'll have some success at it. And we did."

As global market demands continued to change, Dell moved from Winston-Salem about five years later, but more successes arrived, like the city's outstanding present-day biotech growth and its billion-dollar-plus investment in facilities downtown.

"The biggest economic success is our work with Wake Forest University in the biotech area," Clark said. "We took all of our old, empty tobacco plants, and they're now high-tech

biotech research-and-development" spaces. Caterpillar also runs a massive manufacturing plant in the city. Clark said the local rail lines were a key to that recruitment: "One thing I've learned in economic development is that most big folks with major investments have specific criteria for what they want. They tell you what they're looking for, and you respond."

Community college job-training programs have also readied residents for these opportunities, but Clark highlighted an important takeaway in all this—the speed of industrial turnover and market change.

companies he's run with global reach, including Leesona Industries, maker of textile winding equipment, such as toothbrush bristles and fibers that 3M uses in filters for dialysis equipment. He's also held numerous community roles, serving public and private boards and organizations (Triad Business Bank, Rotary, Better Business Bureau, Chamber of Commerce) and chairing the city's Finance Committee. Clark and his wife, Debbie, are active in their church and have three grown children and two granddaughters.

Whether global or kitchen table, it's all local in his public office role, with

"And I felt like we needed a local government that would be pro-economic development and would be a partner with the private sector into transforming our economy from what it was into what it will be."

» Robert Clark, Winston-Salem City Councilman

"It is a never-ending process because of the shorter lifecycle of jobs today," he said. "You always need to be recruiting new folks because the obsolescence of jobs becomes greater and greater." He also pointed to the changes in artificial intelligence and keeping up with possibilities, both good and challenging.

"Your job might not be eliminated by AI," he said, "but you might be eliminated by someone who knows how to use AI better than you."

A source of Clark's appreciation for all of this is his background in industry and

sensitivities for the support structure around a healthy community economy and affecting tides.

This is the gem of municipal leadership, for Clark, in the ability to help create a prosperous scene. "My point is I think I bring a broad business experience. Running a small company, you do everything from purchasing to payroll, hiring and firing, the whole gamut. And I think that's business knowledge or life skills knowledge that local governments need."

continues on next page

HUTCHENS
— LAW FIRM —

HIGH PERFORMANCE LAW™

910-864-6888

hutchenslawfirm.com

Ethics. Integrity. Hard Work.

Providing legal services to public entity clients throughout the Carolinas for more than forty years in a variety of practice areas.

- Public construction projects and development.
- Public utility projects. • Public contracting.
- Representation of planning/zoning staff and boards.
- Litigation, Arbitration, and Mediation in all state and federal courts.



While Clark's ward is mainly residential, it all connects and highlights how expansive and yet immediate the local government context is.

"When you think of the services you get from government—you get up, you use water and sewer, you drive on the road, there's a stoplight or stop sign, police and firemen protect your house, you may take your kids to school, you might go by the library. All of those services are locally provided," Clark said. "Some of those are county, some of those are city. But they're all locally provided."

He recognizes the significance of all Winston-Salem has done and can do.

"You know the old saying, 'If you can't run with the big dogs, stay on the porch,'" Clark said. "Well, we could come off the porch and compete." <<



Above: Clark at CityVision 2025 in Greenville, N.C., with Winston-Salem Councilwoman Annette Scippio. Below: Clark points to a map of Winston-Salem.

“Running a small company, you do everything from purchasing to payroll, hiring and firing, the whole gamut. And I think that’s business knowledge or life skills knowledge that local governments need.

» Robert Clark, Winston-Salem City Councilman



MUNICIPAL DRIVESAFE PROGRAM

A new program from the League to keep your municipal fleet vehicles safe on the road

Local governments rely on vehicles every day to deliver essential services, and this reliance carries risk. Vehicle-related claims drive many members' claims experience, ultimately affecting Property & Casualty Trust's risk exposure and premiums. To protect both people and property, it is critical for local governments to establish and maintain a comprehensive fleet safety program. The Municipal DriveSafe program will help you do just that!

Our safety materials, coupled with regular risk management training courses, will help your employees stay safe on the road.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- Tip sheets and safety information
- Sample fleet management policy and best practices guide
- Template forms and checklists
- Quick safety videos
- More coming!



Town & State Regional Dinners Return



Isabella Mormando
Communications & Multimedia
Strategist

The 2026 Town & State Dinners, already underway, will again take on a regional format during the legislative short sessions, when schedules can limit legislators' time in Raleigh.

The five regional events, held in Wilmington, Concord, Greensboro, Hickory and Raleigh, municipal officials and legislators will come together to discuss local priorities, emerging challenges and the realities facing cities and towns throughout the state. These dinners create a space for candid conversations that help inform better decision-making and strengthen mutual understanding.

Building on the success of prior regional gatherings, these events are designed to foster meaningful dialogue in smaller, more collegial settings, making participation easier and conversations more personal over dinner. The focus is simple and essential: relationship-building, open communication, and a shared

commitment to public service at the state and local levels of government.

We encourage elected officials and local leaders to begin thinking about and discussing the legislative needs of North Carolina's cities and towns. Conversations at the table often touch on economic development, infrastructure, housing and quality-of-life issues, reflecting the diverse experiences of communities large and small.

When lawmakers adjourned in 2025, they did so without agreeing on a full state budget. A combination of smaller spending bills and other legislative actions addressed many municipal concerns, but not all. As always, local bill deadlines will again come quickly, making these regional dinners a timely

opportunity to raise needs and share perspectives early.

The League's cities and towns faced uphill, defensive battles during the 2025 legislative session, but we found success on many fronts. Bills like SB 205 Swimming Pools/Housing Regulatory Reform and HB 765 Save the American Dream Act, representing significant attacks on local land-use planning authority, were shelved thanks to coordinated grassroots advocacy from across the state. At the same time, a core issue present from the start of the session—downzoning—saw action in one legislative chamber but not the other.

As discussions continue into 2026, we encourage municipal officials to remain mindful of how critical local land-use authority is to successful economic development and community planning. Individual anecdotes reflecting the success of planning when it comes to business development projects can be a powerful advocacy tool.

Ultimately, the most meaningful moments of the Town & State Dinners are found during conversations that continue long after plates are cleared. These exchanges help reinforce the shared goal of effectively serving North Carolina's unique communities.

We hope to see you at the remaining Town & State Dinners this spring. <<

Scott Mooneyham contributed to this article.



Far left: Former Clayton Deputy Town Manager Dolores Gill with Rep. Donna White at Goldsboro's regional Town & State Dinner in 2024. Left top: Rep. John Bell with former Sen. Jim Perry at NCLM's Town & State Dinner. Left bottom: Selma Mayor Bryon McAllister with Rep. John Bell at Town & State Dinner in 2024. Above: Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines at Winston-Salem's regional Town & State Dinner in 2024. Below: Sen. Norman Sanderson with NCLM's Director of Government Affairs Erin Wynia.



HANSEN

At Hansen, we're focused on what matters most – designing and implementing software that enables energy and communications service providers to bring to market new products and services faster, sell and deliver them flawlessly to customers and engage meaningfully at all points of customer interaction.

Everyday we set out to inspire and challenge today's utilities and telecom providers to become tomorrow's next digitally-driven experience companies.

CREATE. DELIVER. ENGAGE.

DIFFERENTLY.

50 years of serving customers in the utilities, energy and communications services industries.

☎ 404-380-0266 ✉ sales_americas@hansencx.com

www.HANSENCX.com



League Program Empowers Towns with Stronger Financial Management

Stephanie Hughes
Communications & Multimedia
Strategist (ARP)

Managing the finances of a municipality is no small task, yet finance officers are often left with limited support and systems that were not designed with local governments in mind. Recognizing the need for stronger, more consistent financial support, the League sought a way to walk alongside towns to help strengthen operations and build a solid fiscal foundation.

In 2021, the League worked closely with the North Carolina General Assembly to identify ways the state's American Rescue Plan funding could provide transformative support to cities and towns across the state. Following conversations with members around the state, the League launched its Municipal Accounting Services (MAS) program the following year. The MAS program was designed to promote

better financial accountability and reliability for smaller governments.

As part of the MAS program, towns transition from their existing accounting software to a platform built specifically for small-town governments. Beyond the software itself, towns receive ongoing guidance from a dedicated MAS mentor and software customer service representatives, ensuring municipal finance staff have access

to best practices and reliable support throughout the process.

Caswell Beach: A Conversion Tested by Transition

Caswell Beach was one of the first towns to join the software conversion program when it launched. The seaside town is home to about 400 residents on the east end of Oak Island, a number that quadruples during the summer



Far left: Caswell Beach Oak Island Lighthouse. Left: Patrick McGowan, Caswell Beach Town Clerk. Below: Katie Atkins, Caswell Beach Finance Officer, with NCLM's Cindy Graham.

“It was exciting knowing that I had worked with software, but I have never had the resource of the League before. ... It has been an invaluable tool to have a mentor.

» Katie Atkins, Caswell Beach Finance Officer



months. The town's goal was simple—improve its financial oversight.

Patrick McGowan joined Caswell Beach as town clerk in August 2022, and the following summer the town began its software conversion to Black Mountain Software. A few weeks into the process, the finance officer left, and McGowan stepped into the role on an interim basis despite not having previous accounting experience.

“I had no financial background whatsoever, but I came in with the will to learn and to do the best job I could,” McGowan said.

“Being able to pick up the phone and call [the League's MAS mentor] Cindy Graham every single day ... gave me an understanding of what I was doing and made sure it was right and was a best practice for the town,” McGowan said.

Later, when the town hired Katie Atkins as its full-time finance officer, she brought accounting experience and prior familiarity with the accounting software, but the support from MAS added to her confidence.

“It was exciting knowing that I had worked with software, but I have never had the resource of the League

continues on next page

before,” Atkins said. “It has been an invaluable tool to have a mentor.”

Today, the software has streamlined Caswell Beach’s financial processes, improved access to reporting, and strengthened the town’s audit procedures.

Pikeville: Simplifying Financial Systems

Pikeville was the first town to complete the MAS software transition, finishing in fall 2023. Prior to conversion, the town relied on multiple platforms and outsourced much of its financial operations, which created challenges with efficiency and oversight.

“With this new software, everything’s on one system,” said Wendy Holland, Pikeville’s town clerk and finance officer. “We’ve brought everything back in house rather than outsourcing it, which has made it much more efficient. ... Everything’s automated, so there’s less chance of human error.”

Holland said the transition has helped streamline day-to-day operations



Above: NCLM’s Tracy Chestnutt and Wendy Holland, Pikeville Town Clerk and Finance Officer. Below: Attendees at the accounting software user conference.

while giving staff access to reports and financial information that were not previously available. She also credits the League’s training and hands-on support for helping Pikeville navigate the change and build a stronger financial foundation for the future.

“The software has been very valuable, but without the League’s help, we would have had some very difficult times,” Holland said. “They’ve been there to help us and support us, and to me, that’s just as important as the software.”

“The software has been very valuable, but without the League’s help, we would have had some very difficult times.”

» Wendy Holland, Pikeville Town Clerk and Finance Officer



Strengthening the Network

Building on the progress towns were already making through the MAS software conversion program, the League hosted its inaugural accounting software user conference last year where 73 participants from 38 towns gathered in Greensboro. The event was designed not only to provide additional training on the software, but also to bring towns together and create a network of support among peers who had gone through—or were preparing for—the same transition.

“We wanted to host the conference to give the towns that use [the software] an opportunity to get together, network and learn from each other,” Diane Seafood, deputy director for MAS, said.

“All of us collaborating and having an opportunity to bounce ideas off each other ... it put some more spark in me that I can do this,” said Lynne Conner, town clerk and finance officer for the Town of Aulander.



Above: Attendees at the accounting software user conference.

Moving Forward

Building on the progress made so far, the League's MAS team will continue working with small towns across North Carolina throughout the coming year. At the end of 2025, the program has converted 34 towns to the new

accounting software, with another 13 on the wait list to be transitioned in 2026. Through continued software conversions, training, and one-on-one mentorship, the program is helping towns strengthen financial practices and improve long-term stability. <<

We are a cooperative that holds purchasing contracts in 29 different categories with 70 contracted vendors.

We continue the public bidding process to gain new categories and vetted vendors throughout the year. We work on saving you time and money with your purchases and provide annual cash back rebates.



**Nita Werner,
Executive Director**

**CA4I dba CarolinaBUY
P.O. Box 293
770 Pelham Road
Greenville, SC 29602
307-351-7116**

nwerner@carolinabuy.com



**NC Headquarters
646 Players Ridge Road
Hickory, NC 28601
carolinabuy.com**





TAKING THE FIELD

A New Chapter for North Carolina's Cities & Towns

Rose Vaughn Williams
NCLM Executive Director

Election seasons always mark moments of transition for our cities and towns. This election cycle brought significant change, with many municipalities' governing boards experiencing noticeable turnover, and many first-time elected officials stepping into public service. That level of transition is both energizing and challenging. New perspectives and fresh ideas can strengthen local governance, but the learning curve is often steep. Newly elected leaders are showing they are ready for the challenge.

The North Carolina League of Municipalities supports cities and towns at every stage of leadership. Your involvement with the League is more important than ever, as these transitions and changes can stress existing working relationships, while new relationships take time to develop. Transitions can also lead to tension with the public, particularly when public discourse too often rewards division over collaboration.

Committing to civility from the outset is essential.

Practicing civility allows governing boards to disagree productively, to listen carefully and to make better decisions on behalf of their communities. It fosters trust among colleagues and the public. Civility can be the difference between dysfunction and progress.

The League encourages this principle through the Commit to Civility certificate offered through the League's Advancing Municipal Leadership (AML) continuing education program. This program underscores that leadership is also about how we conduct ourselves in public service. It reflects a shared pledge for governing boards to uphold respectful dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

For those of you who are first-time elected officials, committing to civility now sets the tone early and establishes expectations for how business will be done. For seasoned leaders, it reinforces that experience brings responsibility. And for residents watching local government at work, it demonstrates that their leaders are serious about governing with integrity and respect.

the hundreds of participants who were paying close attention, asking good questions and sharing insights with each other. I watched as they moved from a campaign-centered mindset to governing—it was heartening to witness.

North Carolina's cities and towns are strongest when their leaders are informed, engaged and respectful.

“North Carolina's cities and towns are strongest when their leaders are informed, engaged and respectful.”

» Rose Vaughn Williams, NCLM Executive Director

As we begin this new chapter together, I encourage every municipal official—new and returning—to engage fully with the League, take advantage of its resources and commit to the principles that make local government work. Participate. Learn. Connect. And above all, lead with civility.

As I write this, we have just finished the five Essentials of Municipal Government classes in partnership with the UNC School of Government. I was struck by

Across North Carolina, local voters made their voices heard—reaffirming leadership in some communities and ushering in new voices in many others. On behalf of the League, congratulations to each of you who were elected to municipal office! I look forward to working alongside you as you serve your communities. <<



Above: NCLM's Jennifer Schneier presenting at recent Essentials of Municipal Government course in Wilmington.



World Class Customer Service!

Our ATM team members cultivate business relationships based on integrity, honesty, and mutual respect. With a management team that has over 200 years of combined experience and vast knowledge of the water tank maintenance industry, ATM will provide customers with optimal solutions for their water tank needs.

Our Capabilities:

- Professional Water Tank Services • Tank Maintenance Programs
- Mixing Systems • Exterior/Interior Paint Renovations
- Fully Contained Lead Abatements • Major & Minor Repairs
- Washout Inspections & Cleanings • ROV Inspections
- Logo Design & Application • Chemical Cleaning • Emergency Services
- Visual Inspections • Paint Touch-Ups • Exterior Pressure Wash

See how our unique program is changing the industry!

CALL 800.418.6099
info@americantankmaintenance.com

American Tank Maintenance
www.americantankmaintenance.com



ALAN A. ANDREWS

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

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

(919) 929-3905
broughlawfirm.com

2026 RISK MANAGEMENT BOARD OF TRUSTEES



CHAIR

Liz Johnson
Council Member
Morrisville



VICE CHAIR

Kyle Hayman
Mayor
Conover



Ben Naprstek
Safety & Risk Manager
Wake Forest



Veronica Carter
Council Member
Leland



Letitia Goard
Council Member
Mayodan



Daniel Weeks
Assistant Town
Manager
Holly Springs



John Connet
City Manager
Hendersonville



Jonathan Kanipe
Town Manager
Biltmore Forest



Matt Zapp
Town Manager
Beaufort



La'Trecia Glover
Mayor Pro Tem
Harrisburg



Doug Matheson
Council Member
Blowing Rock



Rose Vaughn Williams
Ex-officio, NCLM
Executive Director



**REAL
PEOPLE**

**REAL
SOLUTIONS**

**REAL
IMPACT**



**BOLTON
& MENK**

Real People. Real Solutions.

www.Bolton-Menk.com

**FREE AD
DESIGN WITH
PURCHASE OF
THIS SPACE**

Call 414-507-6500



RMS REGIONAL MEETINGS

S P R I N G 2 0 2 6

March 17 - Flat Rock

March 18 - Mt. Holly

March 19 - Lewisville

March 24 - Leland

March 25 - Winterville

March 26 - Wake Forest

REGISTER NOW!



Language Services:

- **Interpretation:** On-site, Telephonic & Video, 200+ Languages
- **Translation:** Document Review, Recorded Statements

Transportation Services

- Non Emergency • Wheel Chair • Stretcher • BLS & ALS

Concierge Services:

- Air Ambulance • Commercial Flights • Hotels

Educational CEU'S

WWW.AMBASSADORSG.COM

919.570.9674

90+ Data Points Simplified into the Insights That Matter.



ROSE
ASSOCIATES

*Turn Municipal Spending into
Measurable Quality of Life Gains
with this helpful tool.*

No gimmicks, no redundant
reports, and no guesswork about
where to get the most value for
the money you spend.



Krose@roseassociates.com



704-896-0094



<http://roseassociates.com>

IN MEMORIAM

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



Donald “Don” Nelson Brookshire
January 17, 1954 – November 29, 2025
Former Mount Airy City Manager

Brookshire was appointed to the NCLM Board of Trustees in 1989.



Terence “Terry” Lee Gray Sr.
January 3, 1956 – November 27, 2025
Kill Devil Hills Commissioner and Former Mayor

Commissioner Gray served on the NCLM Board of Directors from 1994 to 1995.



Thomas “Tom” Livingston White Jr.
June 6, 1938 – November 24, 2025
Former Nags Head and Southern Shores Town Attorney

“We believe it’s important to celebrate their legacies and the impact they’ve had on local governance and civic life.”



Scan QR code
to submit your tribute.

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

Reach a hyperlocal audience.

An advertisement in this publication is a highly effective way to promote your business to the Southern City community.



Call me to reserve this spot today!

Mark Hiller | 414-507-6500





434 Fayetteville Street, Suite 1900
Raleigh, NC 27601

nclm.org

COMMUNITY CONNECTION

That's the VALUE of public power.



❖ **ELECTRICITIES of NC**

Learn more at ElectriCities.com