Winter 2022 Volume 79, Issue 3

The Alabama MUNICIPAL Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities

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The Alabama
MUNICIPAL
Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities

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In this Issue

Communities as Classrooms

On the Cover:

Twenty years ago, in January 2002, the League's two insurance companies – the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) and the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund (MWCF) – created a joint Loss Control Division allowing both programs to provide additional staff and expanded services at a much reduced cost to their members. The SKIDCAR program is part of the specialized training offered via the Loss Control Division. See p. 7.

2022 Building on 2021's Momentum!

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

Happy New Year! I hope each of you enjoyed the holiday season and were able to spend quality time with family and friends. Before we look ahead to 2022, I want to take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments of 2021. Last year, the League held several in-person events which were well attended by our membership and community/strategic partners; we were successful in the adoption of state and federal legislation aimed at enhancing the quality for life of our municipalities and its citizens; and we implemented several new League programs, such as the Economic Development Academy. I want to thank our board of directors, staff and strategic partners for their investment and commitment to our organization. Because of your steadfast leadership and unwavering support, the League continues to be the leading voice of municipal government.

As we enter and look ahead to 2022, we hope to build on the momentum created in 2021 by offering several engagement opportunities that we encourage our members to take advantage of.

The Regular Legislative Session is right around the corner! Lawmakers return to Montgomery on January 11 and are slated to be in session until late April. With several issues impacting municipal government on the horizon, your relationship with your lawmakers will be vital. Our members are the most effective advocates on local issues, and it is essential that lawmakers hear from their constituents regarding policy making decisions. Knowing this, each year the League hosts its annual Advocacy Day in Montgomery which is specifically designed to allow municipal officials to share their ideas and concerns with the state's political leadership. Advocacy Day provides a unique opportunity each year for municipal leaders to discuss their messages with their legislative delegations – and for the power of our membership's collective voice to be heard. You can register for Advocacy Day by visiting www.almonline.org or by registering in person the day of the event on January 19th.

As we approach the legislative session and Advocacy Day, I hope that you will use the tools on our website that have been designed to assist you in making sure your voice is heard whether at the State House or during hometown visits. These tools can also be very helpful as you communicate throughout the year with your Congressional delegation. To locate those tools please visit www.almonline.org > Legislative Advocacy > Grassroots Advocacy. If you need any assistance, do not hesitate to contact a member of our advocacy team (see photo above).

Also, if you are not receiving the *State House Advocate*, please be sure to email Kayla Bass, ALM Director of External Affairs. The *State House Advocate* is emailed to members on Friday afternoons when the Legislature is in session and highlights upcoming legislative issues; details any actions needed by our members; and provides links to ALISON as well as Senate and House contacts, text of bills, etc.

Each of these tools and networking opportunities outlined above are developed to strengthen municipal government and ensure that our members have the resources necessary when advocating on behalf of their city or town.

The League's Advocacy Team. Standing: ALM Executive Director Greg Cochran, Director of Governmental Affairs Bryan Parker and Director of Policy and Research Baker Allen. Seated: Director of External Affairs Kayla Bass and General Counsel Lori Lein.

Looking ahead, NLC's Congressional City Conference will be held March 14-16 in Washington, D.C. This conference is specifically aimed at connecting local leaders with their Congressional delegation. Throughout the conference, the League will work with our congressional delegation and officials to host the Alabama Caucus Reception and several other events/dinners. As those events are planned, we will update conference attendees. Keep in mind, just as you communicate the issues and concerns of municipal government to your state leadership, it is equally as important you do the same with your Congressional delegation. It takes all levels of government working in unison to create communities that can be a place where businesses want to invest and where citizens want to live, work, play and prosper. You can register for the Congressional City Conference at www.nlc.org. *(As of this publication, the conference is scheduled to be in-person. Should something change, we will notify our membership.)*

Starting in February and going through September, the League's legal team will host five CMO regional trainings on the fundamentals of municipal government. To register and view the agenda, please visit our website. Additionally, your League staff has already begun working on details for the annual Convention being held May 11-14 in Tuscaloosa. We have an exciting agenda planned with speakers that include Coach Nick Saban, motivational speaker and author Brittany Wagner from Netflix's *Last Chance U* and several concurrent sessions to include intentional, relevant topics. Due to popular demand, we are also bringing back roundtables! Roundtables are a great opportunity to engage with your peers and discuss similar solutions and challenges facing your communities. Stay tuned for registration opening in mid-February.

In closing, I want to congratulate the League's Loss Control Division on celebrating its 20th Anniversary. I well remember discussions around creating this division and it has been a worthwhile program offering great resources to our membership. We have an incredible staff that travels the state, and their diligence in meeting with our officials has resulted in safer workplaces. I commend them on their efforts and look forward to seeing all they accomplish throughout the next several years!

Peace be with you. ■

Leadership Perspective

Mayor Gary Fuller • Opelika • ALM President

Since 1935, the Alabama League of Municipalities has not only served as a voice for municipal government at the Alabama Legislature, but as a trusted and continually evolving resource for municipal officials and staff as we work to ensure the vitality and livability of our communities. Throughout its history, the League has developed a plethora of beneficial programs designed specifically for Alabama's cities and towns, beginning in 1942 with the Municipal Revenue Service, which was created to collect unpaid and escaped delinquent insurance license taxes from insurance companies doing business in Alabama's municipalities. In 1976, the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. (MWCF) was established to provide workers compensation insurance coverage to municipalities, housing authorities, utility boards and other city agencies. In 1989, the League spearheaded the formation of the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) as a mutual insurance company organized under the laws of the State of Alabama and owned by its member municipalities to write all lines of automobile, commercial general liability, police professional liability, public officials errors and omissions coverage, cyber liability, bonds, property and inland marine insurance. Then, 20 years ago, in January 2002, the League's two insurance companies, AMIC and MWCF, created a joint Loss Control Division allowing both programs to provide additional staff and expanded risk management services at a much reduced cost to their members. Many of you reading this understand the importance of these programs because your communities have benefited from them for many years. The Loss Control Division is probably one of the League's most visible because it retains four Loss Control Representatives and four Police Safety Consultants who travel the state making in-person visits as well as offers an Employment Practices Hotline, regional and on-site training programs on a number of loss prevention topics and exclusive, state-of-the-art training such as the SKIDCAR defensive driving program and the Firearms Training System (FATS). And with 20 years of excellent risk management guidance, I am quite certain our cities and towns have benefited greatly – and probably avoided a number of very expensive oversights – thanks to the diligence and proactive actions of our League! ■

Mayor Lawrence "Tony" Haygood, Jr. • Tuskegee • ALM Vice President

Engaging young people in the processes of local government and encouraging them to be civically mindful is more important than ever. As schools focus less on teaching students how to be active, engaged, contributing citizens – what that means and how it should look – it has become necessary for other organizations and even municipalities to take on that role.

In Alabama, we are very fortunate to have the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC), a 501(c)(3) based at the American Village in Montevallo and named after Dr. David Mathews, the youngest president of the University of Alabama from 1969 until 1980 and longtime president and chief executive officer of the Charles. F. Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio. The DMC, which is an ALM Community Partner, was formed to strengthen civic life in all 67 Alabama counties through programming that includes convening and moderating deliberative public forums, conducting moderator and convener training workshops and developing youth leadership and community engagement opportunities. One of its signature programs, the Jean O'Conner-Snyder Internship (JOIP), builds on the next generation's spirit of connection and civic engagement by providing immersive civic learning opportunities for college students in municipalities throughout Alabama through hands-on community-based projects. In the "Communities as Classrooms" special feature in this issue of the *Journal*, you will learn more about the DMC's internship program, the importance of internships, how to become a host community for an intern as well as read several articles written by JOIP interns about their community-based experiences.

Additionally, the League is doing its part by once again hiring a college intern to work closely with ALM's advocacy team during the 2022 Regular Session. Due to COVID, last year's interns were confined to virtual meetings and didn't have the engagement opportunities or in-person experience at the State House we hope to provide this year. I encourage you as municipal leaders to consider ways to engage young people in your communities. It matters. They are our future. ■

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Loss Control Division turns 20!

The Alabama League of Municipalities established the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund, Inc. (MWCF) in 1976 to provide workers compensation insurance to municipalities, housing authorities, utility boards and other city and state agencies (www.almwcf.org). The League then founded the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation (AMIC) in 1989 as a mutual insurance company that writes many lines of insurance and is owned by its member municipalities (www.amicentral.org). In January 2002, AMIC and MWCF created a joint **Loss Control Division** (www.losscontrol.org) allowing both insurance programs to provide additional staff and expanded services at a much reduced cost to their members.

For the past two decades, the Loss Control Division has offered a variety of resources, including an Employment Practices Hotline, regional and on-site training programs on a number of loss prevention topics as well as exclusive, state-of-the-art training such as the SKIDCAR defensive driving program and the Firearms Training System (FATS). Four loss control representatives are assigned a specific region and visit members throughout Alabama, and four police safety representatives provide specialized services statewide. The many programs AMIC and MWCF have implemented since 2002 are designed specifically to deal with the liability and work comp issues Alabama's municipalities face daily. Additionally, the Loss Control Team is highly skilled and provides expert support throughout the entire state.

Loss control services include:

- On-site Risk Management with follow-up reports and recommendations
- Specialized Law Enforcement Risk Control
- Loss Analysis and Trending
- Newsletters and Bulletins
- Technical Resources
- Employment Practices Law Hotline
- Proactive Driver Training (SKIDCAR)
- Firearms Training System (FATS)
- Fire Extinguisher Training
- Safety DVD Library
- Online Training via LocalGovU
- Safety Seminars
- Loss Control Website: **www.losscontrol.org**

MWCF Operations Manager Richard Buttenshaw served in the Loss Control Division for 11 years as AMIC/MWCF's South Alabama Loss Control Representative before moving to MWCF. "Having served in the Loss Control Division for many years, I am uniquely acquainted with our services as well as the importance of the resources provided to our members by our team." he said. "Our loss control and public safety representatives meet face-to-face with our members more frequently than any other AMIC, MWCF or League staffers. This has allowed us to evolve and develop our services to meet our members' needs as their needs have evolved over the past 20 years. Thanks to the diligence of our team, workplace safety has improved significantly for our members and their employees. Additionally, our loss control services have helped reduce the number of claims handled annually, and our economies of scale have allowed AMIC/MWCF to provide intensive hands-on programming, such as our SKIDCAR and FATS programs, that smaller member communities would not likely have access to otherwise. Our team is constantly reviewing services provided by other states to ensure that we remain on the cutting edge for our next 20 years – and the fact that we are still going strong while continuing to develop value-added resources and services speaks to the success and importance of this division." ▪

Loss Control Reps and Territories

Four loss control representatives are assigned a specific region and visit members throughout the state.

Todd McCarley
tmccarley@almonline.org

Todd joined the Loss Control Team in 2003 following 17 years with the Prattville Fire Department where he earned the rank of Lt. Supervisor. His numerous certifications include: fire inspector, arson investigator, hazardous material technician, confined space rescue, rapid deployment search and rescue and personal watercraft rescue. He also served as an instructor for the Alabama State Fire College.

Stephanie Southerland, CMC, CPM
ssoutherland@almonline.org

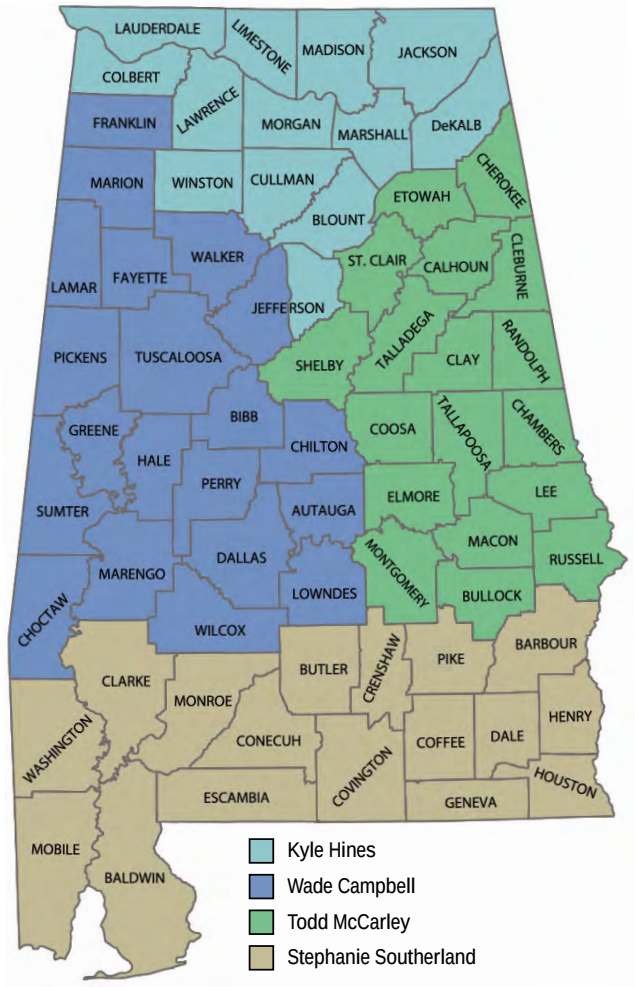
Stephanie joined the Loss Control Team in 2014 following 3 years as an appointee by Gov. Robert Bentley as a Community Liaison Officer with ADECA. The previous 12 years, Stephanie worked for the City of Prattville as a Human Resources Administrator, Assistant City Clerk and City Clerk. She earned her Certified Public Manager certification in 1994 and her Certified Municipal Clerk designation in 2009.

Wade Campbell, GSP
wcampbell@almonline.org

Wade joined the Loss Control Team in 2019 after graduating from Murray State University where he earned his Bachelor's degree in Occupational Safety and Health. In addition, he has obtained his Graduated Safety Practitioner (GSP) certification. Wade is originally from Kentucky and enjoys spending quality time with friends and family and loves to cheer on his beloved Kentucky Wildcats.

Kyle Hines
khines@almonline.org

Kyle joined the Loss Control Team in 2021 after graduating from Troy University with a bachelor's degree in Risk Management Insurance. He previously interned at AMIC in the summer of 2019. Kyle is originally from Montgomery but now resides in Birmingham, and likes to spend time with his family as well as reading and working on his cars.



Donna Wagner
Loss Control Coordinator
dwagner@almonline.org

Sonya McCarley
Loss Control Clerk
smccarley@almonline.org

Donna joined the Loss Control Division in 2001 as a Loss Control Assistant and became the Loss Control Coordinator in 2008. Sonya joined the Loss Control staff in June 2003 as a Loss Control Clerk.

Police Safety Services

Terry Sanders
Police Safety Consultant
tsanders@almonline.org

Terry joined the Loss Control Division in 2012 with more than 30 years of law enforcement experience. He is responsible for traveling to member police departments in the southern region with liability or workers compensation insurance in an effort to reduce municipal liability and employee injuries.

Louis Zook
Police Safety Consultant
lzook@almonline.org

Louis joined the Loss Control Division in 2018 after more than 37 years of law enforcement experience. He is responsible for traveling to member police departments in the northern region with liability or workers compensation insurance in an effort to reduce municipal liability and employee injuries.

Pete Folmar
SKIDCAR Coordinator
pfolmar@almonline.org

Pete joined the Loss Control Division in 2020 after 26 years of law enforcement experience. He is responsible for the Proactive Driver Training program and travels throughout the state training police officers and other municipal employees using the Loss Control Division's SKIDCAR system.

Chuck Burns
FATS Coordinator
cburns@almonline.org

Chuck, FATS Coordinator for the Loss Control Division since 2008, retired from the AL Dept. of Public Safety in 2004 with 28 years of service. He delivers the Firearms Training System (FATS) and provides instruction on how to use the equipment to police districts throughout the state.

Employment Practices Law Hotline
Through a toll-free phone number, **1-800-864-5324**, members can be in direct contact with an attorney specializing in employment-related issues. When faced with a potential employment situation, the hotline provides a no-cost, 30 minute consultation.

Firearms Training System (FATS)
FATS utilizes digital interactive training technology allowing officers to strengthen decision-making skills by responding to real-life scenarios where force may be necessary.

Proactive Driver Training (SKIDCAR)
Through an advanced, computer-controlled driver training vehicle known as the SKIDCAR System, students are taught a program based on driver discipline while experiencing a range of hazardous driving conditions at much lower and safer speeds. Although originally designed for law enforcement, ALL municipal employees are encouraged to complete the program for their own driving safety. Training is conducted year-round throughout the state at a minimal cost.

Risk Management Site Review
Members may request a comprehensive, on-site evaluation and review of all entity operations and properties by AMIC and MWCF loss control specialists. A formal report, complete with photos and loss control recommendations, identifies potential hazards and reasonable solutions.

Safety Library and Online Training
Visit **www.losscontrol.org** for a current list of safety DVDs available to be "checked out" by the member which may be kept for up to 14 days. In addition, numerous online training courses are available at no charge via LocalGovU.

Fire Extinguisher Training
Live training using the latest available technology is available for members to promote correct fire extinguisher use by every employee. This training is not exclusive to fire departments.

Questions? Contact Donna Wagner • Loss Control Coordinator • 334-386-8125 • dwagner@almonline.org

www.losscontrol.org • 334-262-2566

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Congratulations, 2021 CMO graduates!

On November 3, 2021, a total of 47 municipal officials graduated with their CMO certification. Twenty-three officials received their Advanced CMO certification. Eleven officials received their CMO Emeritus certification.

2021 CMO Emeriti • 7th Graduating Class

Councilmember Mary S. Cooper, Robertsdale
Councilmember Arthur L. Day, Jr., Phenix City
Mayor Larry J. Fetner, Ashland
Mayor Lawrence F. Haygood, Jr., Tuskegee
Councilmember Veronica S. Hudson, Saraland
Councilmember Winston Jackson, Ozark
Councilmember Joseph M. Kitchens, Robertsdale
Councilmember Don A. Mack, Sr., Centreville
Mayor William Ronnie Marks, Athens
Councilmember Bobby Seabolt, Bridgeport
Councilmember Carolyn Smith, Lineville

2021 Advanced CMOs • 23rd Graduating Class

Mayor John M. Blankenship, Ozark
Councilmember Dollie M. Blue, Midway
Councilmember Mary Carter, Oak Grove
Councilmember William Foster, Tuscumbia
Councilmember Annette F. Gaither, Ashland
Councilmember Debra Inabinett, Florala
Councilmember Chad Jackson, Opp
Councilmember Dean Kirkner, Clay
Councilmember Bill Moody, Childersburg
Councilmember Emanuel L. Phillips, Satsuma
Councilmember Allison Reese, Satsuma
Mayor Leonard Riley, Valley
Councilmember Brandon Robinson, Childersburg
Councilmember Thonia Rowe, Pennington
Mayor Annie M. Shelton, Beatrice
Mayor Dana L. Snyder, Southside
Councilmember Lynda Spann, Beatrice
Councilmember Jerry Starnes, Prattville
Councilmember Jannie Thomas, Selma
Councilmember Sylvia Wallace-Patton, Florala
Mayor Roger Weatherwax, Moulton
Councilmember Jacquelyn Wesson, Warrior
Councilmember Randall E. Whitaker, Guntersville

2021 Certified Municipal Officials • 26th Graduating Class

Mayor Chuck Ables, Geraldine
Councilmember James L. Armstrong, Sr., Graysville
Councilmember Kent Back, Gadsden
Councilmember Genny Ball, Southside
Councilmember Veronica Bandy-Freeman, Tarrant
Mayor Mark A. Barlow, Satsuma
Councilmember Cheryl P. Barton, Brewton
Mayor Roderick Clark, Union Springs
Councilmember Keith Clay, Southside
Councilmember D.M. Collins, Center Point
Councilmember Ebonee Copeland, Center Point
Councilmember Patrick Dean, Priceville
Councilmember Melvin Duran, III, Priceville
Councilmember Ashley W. England, Priceville
Mayor Jo Ann Fambrough, Munford
Councilmember Byron Gaynor, Brundidge
Councilmember Annie W. Gee, Akron
Councilmember Michael Gibson, Sr., Boligee
Councilmember Teresa Head-Mack, Boligee
Councilmember Clark Duane Hopper, Rainbow City
Councilmember Joseph Hutchins, Southside
Councilmember David Jennings, Brewton
Councilmember Russell Johnson, Robertsdale
Councilmember Vickey Carter Johnson, Phenix City
Mayor Willie Lake, York
Councilmember Mildred Lanier, Pelham
Councilmember Jimmie Herbert Lay, Fultondale
Mayor Donna B. McKay, Wadley
Councilmember Maurice Mercer, Pelham
Mayor David Mitchell, Columbiana
Mayor Don Nelson, Creola
Councilmember Jewel Oliver, Clio
Councilmember George M. Parham, Midway
Councilmember Les Perault, Ozark
Councilmember Christopher Rollins, Akron
Mayor Jonathan Rossell, Akron
Councilmember Thonia Rowe, Pennington
Mayor Hattie Samuels, Boligee
Councilmember Barakas N. Taylor, Fairfield
Mayor Joseph R. Taylor, Rainbow City
Councilmember Charlie Tolbert, Hurtsboro
Councilmember Kevin Turley, Daleville
Councilmember Colt Turner, Glencoe
Councilmember Halee Vogt, Boligee
Councilmember Earnestine Wade, Boligee
Councilmember Jacquelyn Wesson, Warrior
Councilmember Harold Woodman, Helena

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Who is eligible to use the MIS system?

Only municipal entities within Alabama are eligible to use the MIS system. This includes cities, towns, certain utility boards, housing authorities and hospitals. **For more information, visit: www.alintercept.org.**

Your internet service provider may be blocking League emails

By Chuck Stephenson • Director of Information Technology • ALM

As many of you know, ALM changed our website and email addresses from alalm.org to almonline.org. As a result of this change, a handful of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been treating emails from the League's new domain as SPAM and blocking them. Our IT Team has worked with Microsoft and determined that this is occurring because the individual ISPs, out of an abundance of caution, are blocking League emails. Regrettably, this is not something the League can fix for you. There are numerous reasons the ISPs are doing this, and most of them are done because of algorithms that neither you nor the League have any control over. Keep in mind, they do this to protect you and your data. Unfortunately, sometimes their efforts filter out legitimate emails – as we are finding is the case with League emails by several service providers. Fortunately, there is something ***you*** can do to ensure you receive League emails.

Whitelist the League's Domain with Your Service Provider

You will need to contact your service provider directly. Be aware, however, that if you ask your ISP to fix this issue for you, their response will likely be: "We don't actively block any emails." (Which means you probably won't receive much help resolving the issue.) Therefore, you will need to be more specific with your request. Ask them to help you log into the portal website and "whitelist" the League's domain, **almonline.org**, which should resolve your issue. Please note that the portal website is the site where you most likely pay your bill and is ***not*** Outlook or the app on your phone where you receive your email. ■

By Lori Lein, ALM General Counsel

Are we a city or a town?

FAQs on the Impact of the 2020 Census

When the news reports came out in late August of 2021 announcing that the Census Bureau had officially "finalized" the 2020 census numbers, calls started coming into the League from eager towns that had reached the milestone of exceeding 2,000 in population and are, therefore, now considered a city rather than a town: "When can we officially call ourselves a city?" Other questions involved changes to the form of government as a result of the census and changes in revenue collection based on population. Below are some of the most frequently asked questions on the 2020 census and how they might impact your municipality.

1. What is the effective date of the 2020 Census in Alabama? It depends.

Section 1-3-5, Code of Alabama 1975, establishes two effective dates for the decennial census – one for *non-revenue* related matters and one for the collection and distribution of state-shared *revenue* to municipalities.

2. What is the effective date for the collection of revenue based on population? August 12, 2021.

For revenue related matters, the decennial census figures can be used to determine all revenues based on population as soon as the census is "proclaimed, published or certified by the Director of the U.S. Census Bureau." See Section 1-3-5, Code of Alabama 1975. For the 2020 census, that date was August 12, 2021. While not an exhaustive list, taxes affected by population include: Simplified sellers and use tax (SSUT); ABC Board profits; automobile tag tax receipts; state gasoline taxes; privilege tax on oil and gas production; capital improvement fund monies; and municipal license taxes which may be based on population (such as licenses on telephone companies, telegraph companies, insurance companies other than fire and marine, express companies and railroads, and waste grease collection).

The 2020 census figures will have no effect on a municipality's share of certain other revenues, including the financial institutions excise tax, TVA payments, the coal severance tax and the state taxes on beer and table wine, as these taxes are not based on population.

3. What is the effective date for non-revenue matters (or – when can we start calling ourselves a city rather than a town)? May 10, 2022.

For most (but not all, see question 4 below) non-revenue related matters, the census numbers take effect in Alabama on "the one hundred twentieth day after the first day of the first regular session held next after the publication by the federal government" of the final census numbers. The first regular session following the official release of the census numbers on August 12, 2021, will begin on January 11, 2022. Therefore, 120 days from that date can be calculated as May 10, 2022. On that date, if your municipality went over 2,000 in population, you can officially be called a "City" rather than a "Town".

Although it is not possible to list all the state laws governing municipalities that are affected by the upcoming 2020 federal decennial census, the following is a list of the major provisions of Alabama Law that may come into play once the 2020 census is finalized:

- Section 11-40-6 of the Code of Alabama 1975, that all municipalities with less than 2000 inhabitants shall be known as "towns," while those with 2000 or more inhabitants shall be known as "cities."
- Article 3 of Chapter 42 of Title 11, Code of Alabama 1975, creates a method of annexation available to municipalities having a population of 25,000 or more inhabitants.
- Article 4 of Chapter 6 of Title 14, Code of Alabama 1975, gives the Department of Corrections the authority to inspect and supervise municipal jails in all cities with a population of more than 10,000. Municipalities whose populations reach this figure will be subject to the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections upon the effective date of the 2020 census.
- Section 25-5-13 of the Code of Alabama 1975, requires all municipalities of more than 2,000 in population to provide worker's compensation for their employees.
- Sections 11-86-1 through 11-86-6 of the Code of Alabama 1975, provide for the creation of unincorporated recreation boards by municipalities with a population of 100,000 or *less.*
- Section 16-11-1 of the Code of Alabama 1975, gives all municipalities with a population of 5,000 or more the authority to establish a city board of education.
- Sections 11-43-180 through 11-43-190 of the Code of Alabama 1975, require all municipalities of 5,000 or more to have a personnel system for their law enforcement officers.
- Section 3-7A-7 of the Code of Alabama 1975, requires all municipalities over 5,000 in population, in which a county

animal shelter is not located, to maintain a suitable animal shelter.

- Article 1 of Chapter 2A of Title 28, Code of Alabama 1975, authorizes municipalities with populations of 1,000 or more to conduct an election upon the petition of 30% of the number of voters voting in the last preceding general election of the municipality to determine whether a dry municipality goes wet or vice versa for alcoholic beverage sales.
- Section 1-2A-8 of the Code of Alabama 1975, exempts municipalities with a population of 1,000 or less from the requirement that the Alabama State Flag be flown at municipal buildings.
- Section 11-43-5.1 of the Code of Alabama 1975, authorizes municipalities with a population of 5,000 or less to establish or abolish a civil service/merit system for municipal employees.
- Section 11-47-241 of the Code of Alabama 1975, authorizes municipalities with a population of 34,000 or more to plan, build and operate parking facilities.
- Section 11-49-40 of the Code of Alabama 1975, provides that municipalities with a population of more than 35,000 "have full power and authority to require railroad companies to construct and maintain within the city limits viaducts, bridges, and tunnels or parts of viaducts, bridges, and tunnels and their approaches over, along, or under the tracks at their own expense, such bridges and their approaches, tunnels or other conveniences at public crossings and such viaducts and their approaches over their tracks where the same cross or extend along public highways or streets."
- Section 32-5A-171 of the Code of Alabama 1975, prohibits municipalities with a population of less than 19,000 from enforcing speed limits on interstate highways.

4. What is the effective date for changing our form of government (or – we've gone over 12,000 pop., when do we change to a council president)? November 3, 2025.

Municipalities with a mayor-council form of government have different organizational structures depending upon the population of the municipality. Municipalities with populations of 12,000 or more are governed by a council which operates without a vote of the mayor. While the mayor has no vote with the council, he or she has veto power over certain ordinances passed by the council. In municipalities with populations of less than 12,000, the mayor sits as a voting member of the council and also serves as the presiding officer of the council. Therefore, once a municipality reaches a population of 12,000 or more inhabitants, the council procedures change. But exactly when does that change in municipal operation occur? Section 11-40-6 of the Code of Alabama 1975, provides in part:

"At the next election more than four months after the one hundred twentieth day after the first day of the first regular business session of the legislature held next after the publication by the federal government of the regular federal decennial population census for Alabama, if the municipality shows a population which authorizes a change in its government under this title, the proper officers for such a city shall be elected and perform the duties prescribed in this title."

Based on this, a change in the operation of the municipality as a result of a population change will not take place until the *next municipal election* which, in most (but not all) of Alabama's municipalities, will be in August 2025. Newly elected officials will take office on the first Monday in November following the election which is November 3, 2025.

5. Does the census change our municipal classification (or – we're no longer just a Class 8 municipality, right)? No.

We often get calls from municipalities questioning whether their class of municipality changes when their population changes. Section 11-40-12 of the Code of Alabama 1975, establishes eight classes of municipalities based on population. Section 110 of the Official Compilation of the Alabama Constitution of 1901 (formerly Amendment 375), allows the Legislature to adopt legislation affecting one or more classes of municipalities based on the population classifications set out in Section 11-40-12. It is important to note, however, that the classifications found in Section 11-40-12 are based on the 1970 federal decennial census and are not affected by subsequent census changes in population. Once a municipality is classified in a particular class, the class never changes even if the population of the municipality changes significantly.

6. Our municipality is districted. Do we have to redistrict as a result of the census? Maybe.

Section 11-46-23 of the Code of Alabama 1975, authorizes, but does not require, a municipal governing body to divide the municipality into districts for the election of officers. Many, if not most, of Alabama's municipalities are not districted. Additionally, a number of Alabama municipalities were divided by court order.

A shifting municipal population *may require* redrawing these district lines. If the current district lines no longer eliminate the problems sought to be redressed by districting, these lines will have to be redrawn. This adjustment must be made more than three months prior to the election, which for most (but not all) municipalities would be May 26, 2025 – three months prior to the next municipal election in August 2025.

Further, if a municipality was redistricted pursuant to a court order, it is possible that the court has retained jurisdiction and that the new lines must receive court approval before taking effect. All districted municipalities should closely examine their current districts and determine if they should be adjusted as a result of population shifts.

Conclusion

While these FAQs on the 2020 Census provide a simple overview of the potential impact of the census on Alabama's municipalities, it is our hope that it will help our members better understand some of the effects of population changes and shifts. Any questions should be directed to the Legal Department of the Alabama League of Municipalities. ■

Reporting and Compliance Under the American Rescue Plan Act: What's Your Plan?

Terri Reynolds • Managing Attorney • Levitate Legal & Consulting

Cities across the nation are working to develop and implement plans of action to expend their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars. While some are further along in the process than others, local governments have almost universally expressed a desire to create long-term, positive community impacts with this funding opportunity.

Achieving this objective is within reach for every municipality, but to do so requires careful planning and attention to detail.

The ARPA provides significant direct formula grant dollars to municipal governments through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). To help state and local government plan for the expenditure of these dollars, the U.S. Department of Treasury (Treasury) developed an Interim Final Rule (IFR) and Compliance and Reporting Guidelines, which outline the parameters and allowable uses of the funds. Understanding the contents of these two resources, which apply to both direct recipients and non-entitlement units (NEUs), is vital to cities' ability to launch effective ARPA projects and programs.

Cities' use of SLFRF allocations are currently governed by the IFR, which will remain the authority until a Final Rule is issued. Treasury also recently released version 2.1 of the Compliance and Reporting Guidance for SLFRF. This guidance supplements the IFR and provides additional details and clarification around the reporting, subrecipient monitoring, and single audit requirements for SLFRF program funds. These two documents are key resources in understanding Treasury's expectations for SLFRF expenditures, recipient compliance and reporting responsibilities, and best practices in relation to those responsibilities.

While local officials are rightfully excited to receive this once-in-a-lifetime investment, it's important not to lose sight of all that is required now that the money is in hand. While the compliance and reporting requirements in the ARPA are not unusual, they do require accurate record keeping, managing key deadlines, strategic planning and implementation, and following established procurement procedures. Understanding the compliance and reporting requirements is essential to ensuring municipalities responsibly spend and manage the funds post-award. Paying attention to the details and establishing the appropriate controls can minimize headaches down the road.

THE INTERIM FINAL RULE

Until a Final Rule is issued by Treasury, cities should rely on the contents of the IFR as the go-to-guide for the types of programs, projects, and services they implement under ARPA. The IFR is designed to achieve three key objectives:

- Build on the use of eligible expenditures under the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF).
- Recognize the broad range of eligible uses to help guide SLFRF recipients.
- Establish certain regular reporting requirements.

Further, each expenditure must tie back to at least one of the eligible uses of the SLFRF monies:

1. To respond to the public health emergency or its negative economic impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality;
2. To respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers;
3. For the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue due to the COVID–19 public health emergency relative to revenues collected in the most recent full fiscal year prior to the emergency; and
4. To make necessary investments in water, sewer, or broadband infrastructure.

The IFR includes key frameworks and definitions to help cities understand how to develop programs and expend ARPA funds within the proper parameters. For example, cities should refer to the IFR for guiding frameworks on the following:

- Ensuring proper reporting and monitoring of eligible SLFRF uses;
- Determining if a project "responds to" a "negative economic impact" caused by the COVID-19 public health emergency;
- Determining eligible water and sewer infrastructure projects that align with projects that are eligible under the Environmental Protection Agency's Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds; and
- Determining eligible broadband projects designed to provide service to unserved or underserved households, or businesses at speeds sufficient to enable users to generally meet household needs.

The IFR also includes definitions for key terminology that cities must accurately interpret to remain compliant with the IFR. For example, cities seeking to grant premium pay to 'eligible employees' should ensure such employees perform 'essential work'[1] as defined in the IFR. The IFR further provides information on prohibited uses of SLFRF award funds. It restricts cities from depositing SLFRF dollars into a pension fund; prohibits using SLFRF dollars as non-Federal match where prohibited; and generally bars using SLFRF dollars to service debt, satisfy a judgment or settlement, or contribute to a "rainy day" fund. Cities should refer to the IFR for more information on these restrictions.

SLFRF KEY TIMELINES AND DEADLINES

SLFRF funds may be used to cover eligible costs **incurred** during the period that **begins on March 3, 2021 and ends on December 31, 2024**.

- The funds for the obligations incurred by December 31, 2024 must be **expended by December 31, 2026**.
- Costs for projects **incurred prior to March 3, 2021 generally are not eligible**, as provided for in the IFR

REPORTING AND COMPLIANCE GUIDANCE

The Reporting and Compliance Guidance makes many references to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200), the generally applicable provisions in the Code of Federal Regulations for SLFRF expenditures. Cities should consider how and whether certain aspects of the Uniform Guidance apply as they finalize their spending priorities. For example, under 2 CFR 200.303, cities must develop and implement effective internal controls to ensure funding decisions under the SLFRF award constitute eligible uses of funds, and then document the determinations. To do this effectively, cities should create policies and procedures, and a plan for record retention to determine and monitor the implementation of criteria for determining the eligibility of projects, programs, beneficiaries and/or subrecipients. This will also help ensure compliance with Uniform Guidance Cost Principles[2], which are important for building trust and accountability.

Compliance Tip #1: At least one person with the city should review and understand the parameters of the Uniform Guidance.

Compliance Tip #2: Document how each project and associated costs align with the IFR on use of funds. Ensure all funding is spent how it was intended to be spent and retain documents to support.

Cities, and any subrecipients administering their programs, should also maintain procedures for obtaining information evidencing a given subrecipient, contractor or beneficiary's eligibility including a valid SAM.gov registration. Additionally, any SLFRF recipients that are pass-through entities as defined under 2 CFR 200.1 must manage and monitor their subrecipients to ensure compliance with requirements of the SLFRF award pursuant to Uniform Guidance requirements for pass-through entities.

When working with subrecipients, cities must clearly identify to them (1) that the award is a subaward of SLFRF funds; (2) any and all compliance requirements for use of SLFRF funds; and (3) any and all reporting requirements for expenditures of SLFRF funds. Cities will then need to evaluate their risk of noncompliance based on a set of common factors. These risk assessments may include factors such as prior experience in managing Federal funds, previous audits, personnel, and policies or procedures for award execution and oversight. Cities should develop written policies and procedures for subrecipient monitoring based on the assessed risk, and maintain records of all award agreements identifying or otherwise documenting subrecipients' compliance obligations. Such risk-based due diligence for eligibility determinations is a best practice to further support existing controls.

Compliance Tip #3: Distinguish between the various types of allocations you may make with these funds, and have a risk-assessment plan in place for each type.

- *Subrecipients* operate a program or piece of a program on behalf of the SLFRF recipient
- *Contractors/Vendors* provide services or goods to the SLFRF recipient or program operator in a procurement transaction
- *Beneficiaries* are eligible applicants of SLFRF programming

Cities should also have and use documented procurement procedures that are consistent with the standards outlined in 2 CFR 200.317 through 2 CFR 200.320. The Uniform Guidance requires an infrastructure for competitive bidding and contractor oversight, including maintaining written standards of conduct and prohibitions on dealing with suspended or debarred parties.

2 CFR 200.319 establishes that all procurement transactions for property or services must be conducted in a manner providing full and open competition, consistent with standards outlined in 2 CFR 200.320, which allows for non-competitive procurements only in circumstances where at least one of the following conditions is true: the item is below the micro-purchase threshold, the item is only available from a single source, the public exigency or emergency will not permit a delay from publicizing a competitive solicitation, or after solicitation of a number of sources, competition is determined inadequate. Municipalities should also note that the procurement guidelines in 2 CFR 200 include stricter provisions than what is required by Alabama law, and should plan their procurement procedures accordingly.

Compliance tip #4: Create and follow a procurement process for purchases with this funding source that satisfy applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS BY RECIPIENT

There are three types of reporting requirements for the SLFRF program. The reporting threshold is based on the total award amount allocated by Treasury under the SLFRF program, not the funds received by the recipient as of the time of reporting. User

guides describing how and where to submit required reports can be found at **www.treasury.gov/SLFRPReporting** and are updated on a regular basis.

<table>
<tr><th>Recipient</th><th>Interim Report</th><th>Project and Expenditure Report</th><th>Recovery Plan Performance Report</th></tr>
<tr><td>Metropolitan cities with a population that exceeds 250K residents</td><td rowspan="3">By August 31, 2021 or 60 days after receiving funding if funding was received by October 15, with expenditures by category</td><td rowspan="2">By January 31, 2022 and then 30 days after the end of each quarter thereafter</td><td>By August 31, 2021 or 60 days after receiving funding, and annually thereafter by July 31</td></tr>
<tr><td>Metropolitan cities with a population below 250K residents which received more than $10M in SLFRF funds</td><td rowspan="3">Not required</td></tr>
<tr><td>Metropolitan cities with a population below 250K residents which received less than $10M in SLFRF funds</td><td>By April 30, 2022 and then annually thereafter</td></tr>
<tr><td>NEUs</td><td>Not required</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

FACTORING IN APPLICABLE STATE LAW

In addition to the rules and guidelines provided in the IFR and Reporting Compliance Guidelines, cities must also consider how state law impacts the types of programs that can be implemented with SLFRF monies. The Alabama Attorney General recently released Opinion 2022-002 which raises several issues for consideration. In short, certain payments falling within the permissible parameters of the IFR on ARPA conflict with long-standing prohibitions set out in the Alabama Constitution. Municipalities and their attorneys should closely review this opinion and implement appropriate policies and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable state laws.

Compliance tip #5: Make sure all programs and projects created with SLFRF monies are compliant with the Alabama Constitution and applicable state laws. ■

Endnotes

[1]The IFR FAQ provides that essential workers are those in "critical infrastructure sectors who regularly perform in-person work, interact with others at work, or physically handle items handled by others." The IFR provides many examples of critical infrastructure sectors for reference, but the list is not all inclusive. The IFR FAQ further states that recipients "have the discretion to add additional sectors to this list, so long as the sectors are considered critical to protect the health and well-being of residents."

[2]The Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR Part 200, Subpart E on Cost Principles outlines that allowable costs are based on the premise that a recipient is responsible for the effective administration of Federal awards, application of sound management practices, and administration of Federal funds in a manner consistent with the program objectives and terms and conditions of the award.

Terri Reynolds is the Managing Attorney for Levitate Legal & Consulting. Her legal practice centers around local government law, government affairs and policy analysis. She provides compliance and consulting services to local governments and nonprofit organizations on the effective implementation of ARPA funding. Terri and the Levitate Legal team also consult in the areas of grant writing and administration, program development and implementation, and strategic communications. If you have any questions about this article or would like to learn more about Levitate Legal's services, you may contact Terri by email at terri@levitatelegal.com.

LAND BANK AUTHORITIES – Purpose and Benefits

Caroline W. Douglas, Interim Director, Birmingham Land Bank Authority • James Stanley, General Counsel, Birmingham Land Bank Authority • Benjamin S. Goldman. Hand Arendall Harrison Sale LLC

For the first several years following the 2009 adoption of the Alabama Land Bank Authority Act, Act 2009-738 of the Alabama Legislature, which has been codified as Sections 24-9-1, et seq. of the Code of Alabama (1975), (as amended over time, "the Act"), the powers conferred by the Act belonged only to the Alabama Land Bank Authority. Then, in 2013, the Act was significantly amended, including the addition of Section 24-9-10, which authorized the incorporation of local land bank authorities. See Ala. Act 2013-249. However, after Senate Bill No. 38 of the 213 Regular Session was pre-filed by Senator Linda Coleman-Madison on January 9, 2013, and introduced on February 5, 2013, with language that would have allowed any municipality to form a local authority, on March 1, 2013, an amendment was made to Senate Bill No. 38 that would allow a municipality to form a local authority only "[i]f the number of tax delinquent properties in a municipality exceeds 1,000."

The bill was passed with that limitation, denying most Alabama municipalities the ability to participate in local land banking. See Ala. Act 2013-249 § 2. That remained true until earlier this year when the Alabama Legislature changed the threshold for participation from 1,000 tax delinquent properties within a municipality to 100 tax delinquent properties. See Ala. Act 2021-345. Thus, Act 2013-249 of the Alabama Legislature opened the door for many more Alabama municipalities to participate in land banking and merits a re-examination of the benefits of land banking in Alabama.

Act 2021-345 of the Alabama Legislature also shortened the time for which a parcel had been tax delinquent from five years to three years. See Ala. Act 2021-345 § 1. By reducing the time that a property must linger unmaintained before a land bank authority can acquire an interest in it, the Legislature made a strategic choice to mitigate the compounding effect that time can have on the symptoms of blight.

Even if your municipality does not meet the 100 tax delinquent properties threshold for forming a land bank authority or does not have the resources available to develop and operate a land bank authority, Act 2021-345 provided a new means for Alabama municipalities to benefit from land banking. Now, a municipality or a county can enter into an intergovernmental agreement with a local land bank authority to facilitate

a. The conveyance to the authority of tax delinquent property held by the municipality or county for title clearance, including, but not limited to, a quiet title and foreclosure action under Section 24-9-8.
b. The acquisition and title clearance of property by the authority of property to be conveyed by the authority to the municipality or county or another entity pursuant to the agreement between the authority and the municipality or county.

Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(2) (1975). This means that a local land bank authority – even one that your jurisdiction did not form – can receive a property, quiet its title, and return it to the donating municipality.

Discussion of the Benefits of Land Banking

The purpose of land bank authorities.

Municipalities can acquire properties in many different ways, including by foreclosing on their own liens, which may have resulted from demolitions or grass and weed abatements. However, that does not mean (and often does not mean) that the municipality has clear title to the property. Other liens and lingering interests and claims can cloud the title. This can pose a problem when the municipality wants to return the property to productive use by putting it in the hands of a good steward. Without a clear title, a well-intended owner cannot obtain title insurance or traditional financing.

Even if a municipality or another transferee wants to undertake a traditional quiet title action, the costs associated with doing so can far exceed the property's fair market value. Here enters the land bank authority, which can do two things that a municipality cannot: 1.) scrub the property with an expedited and reduced cost title quiet process and 2.) through that quiet title process, strip all outstanding encumbrances that would otherwise prevent the property's redevelopment. The Act aims to provide the cleanest title possible for a land banked property that has taken advantage of the expedited quiet title procedure:

> Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (k)(2)e. [relating to "a recorded easement or right-of-way, restrictive covenant, prior reservation or severance of all mineral, mining, oil, and gas rights within and underlying the property, such state of facts as shown on recorded plats, or restrictions or covenants imposed under the Alabama Land Recycling

and Economic Development Act or any other environmental law in effect in the state, severed oil, gas, and mineral rights and mineral leases and agreements"], ***fee simple title*** to property set forth in a petition for quiet title filed under subsection (c) shall ***vest absolutely*** in the authority upon the effective date of the judgment by the circuit court and the authority shall have ***absolute title*** to the property. The authority's ***title is not subject to any recorded or unrecorded lien***, except as provided in paragraph (k)(2)e. and shall not be stayed except as provided in subsection (m) [related to appeal from the judgment quieting title]. A judgment entered under this section is a final order with respect to the property affected by the judgment. Ala. Code § 24-9-8(*l*) (1975) (emphasis added).

With these powers, land banks have the ability to unravel blight issues affecting Alabama, especially problems associated with lien-burdened property and heir property. According to the Act, land bank authorities are created for the purpose of acquiring tax delinquent properties in order to foster the public purpose of rehabilitating land which is in a nonrevenue-generating, nontax-producing status to an effective utilization status in order to provide housing, new industry, new commercial and economic development, other productive uses, jobs for the citizens, assemble parcels of real property for redevelopment, stabilize property values, and remove blight. Ala. Code § 24-9-2 (1975).

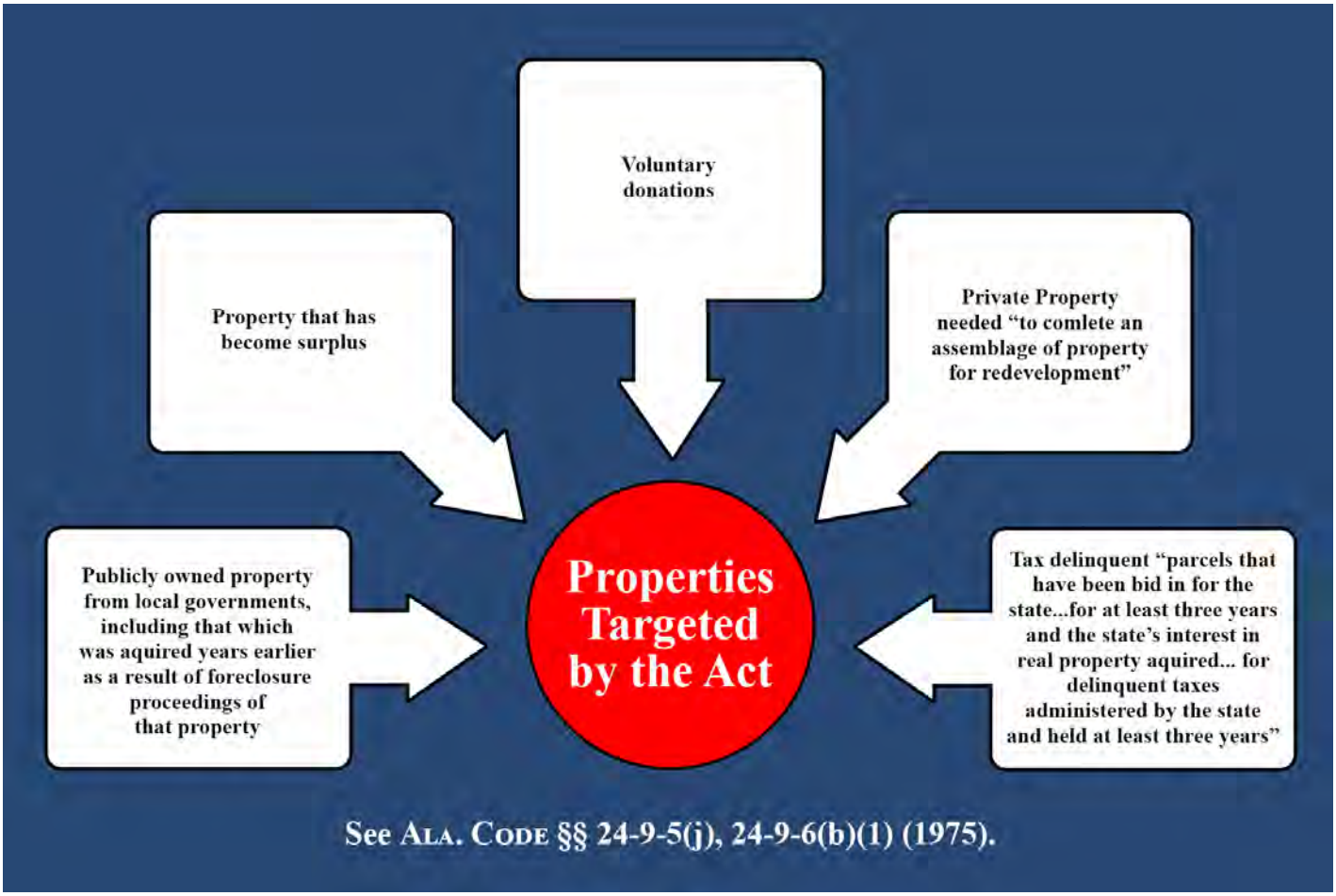
As discussed below, through amendments to the Act, local land bank authorities have been given the authority to acquire properties from a variety of sources to help improve the communities that they serve.

Powers of land bank authorities.

Local land banks are given several important powers,[1] including the following:

- "to accept and issue deeds in its name, including, without limitation, the acceptance of real property in accordance with" the Act, Ala. Code § 24-9-5(i) (1975);
- "to institute quiet title actions as provided in Section 24-9-8," Ala. Code § 24-9-5(i) (1975);
- "any other powers necessary and incidental to carry out the powers and the purpose granted by" the Act, Ala. Code § 24-9-5(i) (1975);
- to "acquire, by purchase, donation, or exchange, other publicly owned property from local governments, including that which was acquired years earlier as a result of foreclosure proceedings of that property, or property that has become surplus. The authority may also acquire property through voluntary donations and transfers from private owners and may acquire by purchase or lease on the open market property from a private owner to complete an assemblage of property for redevelopment," Ala. Code § 24-9-5(j) (1975);
- without being required to pay, request and obtain "a tax deed conveying the state's interest in the property to the authority," Ala. Code § 24-9-6(a) (1975);
- "to manage, maintain, protect, rent, lease, repair, insure, alter, sell, trade, exchange, or otherwise dispose of any [tax delinquent property acquired from the state], on terms and conditions determined in the sole discretion of the authority," Ala. Code § 24-9-6(c)(2) (1975);
- to "manage, maintain, protect, rent, repair, insure, alter, convey, sell, transfer, exchange, lease as lessor, or otherwise dispose of property or rights or interests in property in which the authority holds a legal interest to any public or private person for value determined by the authority on terms and conditions, and in a manner and for an amount of consideration the authority considers proper, fair, and valuable, including for no monetary consideration," Ala. Code § 24-9-7(b) (1975);
- "all of the powers of the" Alabama Land Bank Authority as set forth in the Act, Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e) (1975);
- "prevent the waste or deterioration of, demolish, and take all other actions necessary to preserve the value of the property it holds or owns," Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1) (1975);
- "Grant or acquire a license, easement, or option with respect to property as the authority determines is reasonably necessary to achieve the purposes of" the Act, Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1)a (1975);
- "Fix, charge, and collect rents, fees, and charges for use of property under the control of the authority or for services provided by the authority," Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1)b (1975);
- "Pay any tax or special assessment due on property acquired or owned by the authority," Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1)c (1975);
- "Take any action, provide any notice, or institute any proceeding required to clear or quiet title to property held by the authority in order to establish ownership by and vest title to property in the authority, including, but not limited to, a quiet title and foreclosure action pursuant to Section 24-9-8," Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1)d (1975);
- "Remediate environmental contamination on any property held by the authority," Ala. Code § 24-9-10(e)(1)e (1975).

While the Legislature gave local land bank authorities many powers, authorities do "not have the power of eminent domain." Ala. Code § 24-9-3 (1975).



Property acquisitions.

Tried but true, a picture is worth a thousand words. So, what is a picture of words worth? It is hard to say, but some have correctly pointed out that is basically a photocopy. Thus, it likely depends on your copier lease. In any event, the graphic above provides a neat summary of the ways in which a land bank authority can acquire properties. In addition to the foregoing methods, "a local authority may enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the [Alabama Land Bank Authority] providing for the transfer to the local authority of any property held by the [Alabama Land Bank Authority] which is located within the corporate limits of the municipality or the boundary of the county which created the land bank." Ala. Code § 24-9-10(d) (1975).

Property transfers.

Typical recipients of land banked properties may include those wanting to use the land as owner-occupied property, neighbors seeking to expand the footprint of their homestead, the municipality or county where the property is located, or nonprofits with an interest in redevelopment or housing. That said, a land bank authority is given vast discretion about how it chooses to manage, maintain, protect, rent, repair, insure, alter, convey, sell, transfer, exchange, lease as lessor, or otherwise dispose of property or rights or interests in property in which the authority holds a legal interest to any public or private person for value determined by the authority on terms and conditions, and in a manner and for an amount of consideration the authority considers proper, fair, and valuable, including for no monetary consideration.

Ala. Code § 24-9-7(b) (1975). However, that discretion does have two very important caveats. First, property cannot be conveyed to another entity "for investment purposes only and with no intent to use the property other than to transfer the property at a future date for monetary gain." Ala. Code § 24-9-7(e) (1975). Second, the Act is designed to prevent a prior owner of the property from using a land bank authority as a vehicle to scrub liens or taxes secured by the property:

> The authority shall not sell, trade, exchange, or otherwise dispose of any property held by the authority to any party who had an interest in the property at the time it was tax delinquent or to any party who transferred the party's interest in the property to the authority by sale, trade, exchange, or otherwise, unless the person pays all the taxes, interest, municipal liens, penalties, fees, and any other charges due and owing under Chapter 10 and Chapter 29 of Title 40, including the amount to the Land Commissioner had the property not been transferred to the authority. Ala. Code § 24-9-7(f) (1975).

In cases where a former property owner has expressed an earnest desire to repurchase the property but does not have the funds

on hand to repay "all the taxes, interest, municipal liens, penalties, fees, and any other charges due and owing," the local land bank authority can use its discretion, when appropriate, to enter into a lease-to-purchase agreement with the property owner whereby all of the charges due and owing are repaid. ▪

Endnote

1. "[W]ith great power there must also come great responsibility." Lee, Stan, *Amazing Fantasy #15* (Aug. 1962). *See also* Luke 12:48 (NIV) ("From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.").

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Ben Goldman *is a member in the law firm of Hand Arendall Harrison Sale LLC, a full-service civil firm with offices throughout Alabama and in the panhandle of Florida. He serves on the firm's Executive Committee, as Chair of the firm's State and Local Government Practice Group and as Chair of the firm's Bankruptcy and Creditors Rights Practice Group. He has represented over 75 Alabama municipalities, utilities, development boards and other governmental entities, including as city attorney, prosecutor, corporate counsel and litigation counsel. Goldman is an active member of and frequent presenter for the Alabama Association of Municipal Attorneys, having previously served as its President. In 2012, Goldman was recognized by the International Municipal Lawyers Association with the Daniel J. Curtin Young Public Lawyer of the Year Award as the top public lawyer under 40 in the U.S. and Canada. One of Goldman's municipalities was awarded the Alabama League of Municipalities' Municipal Quality of Life Award for cities of its size for its submission, "Making Blight Right."*

The Cameras are ROLLING in Alabama!

Brian S. Jones • Media & Location Coordinator • Alabama Film Office

The demand for new and original entertainment content has increased dramatically in the last five years. Much of this demand is due to the popularity of the ever-expanding number of streaming services and the growth in overseas markets. And the cameras are once again rolling on television and film production in Alabama after an industry wide halt because of the pandemic.

The Alabama Film Office is the division of the Alabama Department of Commerce that works to attract film and television productions to the state. These productions put money into local economies, provide jobs, and generate positive publicity for communities. The entertainment industry is exactly that – an industry. Spending from film and television productions has averaged almost $70 million annually in Alabama and the entertainment industry is also directly responsible for more than 7,000 jobs in the state.

Temporary Factories

Film and television productions can be thought of as temporary factories that come into a city, produce a sizeable economic impact and then leave once their filming is complete. Some productions may film in a community for a couple of weeks while others may film for a couple of months. When a production comes into an area, local people are hired for a wide range of jobs including carpenters, electricians, drivers, painters, technicians, sound and lighting equipment operators and extras. A production requires a host of goods and services from local businesses including catering, building supplies and rental equipment. Cast and crew also fill up area hotels and frequent local restaurants.

Another economic boom of having a movie or television series film in an area can be the residual effects. A great example of that is the HGTV series "Home Town Takeover" with Ben and Erin Napier that filmed in Wetumpka for several months in 2020. This popular national show ranked as the #1 new unscripted cable series. "Home Town Takeover" not only pumped a lot of money into the local economy while filming, they also renovated 12 homes and businesses in Wetumpka. Just as important is the residual growth in tourism dollars that the city will experience for years to come because of the national publicity they received. Wetumpka has already seen an increase of thousands of tourists coming from across the country to visit the city. These visitors are putting direct dollars into the city's economy by shopping at local stores and eating at local restaurants. Montgomery is now starting to see a similar effect from the success of the new "Wonder Years" television series on ABC. The show is set in Montgomery and the cast and crew spent a week filming at various locations around the city in October 2021. Just that one week of filming brought in more than $2 million dollars in expenditures to the local economy. The show's creator, Saladin Patterson, describes the show as "a love letter to Montgomery" and it has become ABC television's strongest new comedy debut in two years.

"The Wonder Years" and "Home Town Takeover" have made a very real impact that goes far beyond the dollars generated by their filming and the increases in tourism. Both programs have become a showcase for their cities and the entire state.

The Alabama Film Office encourages filming in the state by providing economic incentives and assisting productions in finding local people to hire and local businesses where they can purchase needed materials. The state film office also assists productions in finding locations to film. Alabama is fortunate in that we are a very geographically diverse state. We can offer everything from the mountains and the river valleys up in North Alabama, to great small towns and rural areas, to urban centers like Birmingham and Mobile, to our beautiful gulf coast beaches. Another wonderful asset is our impressive Alabama State Park system. Alabama State Parks operate and maintain 21 state parks across Alabama encompassing 48,000 acres of land and water. State parks are excellent filming locations because they have scenic and natural beauty as well as the infrastructure of roads and parking areas.

Filming "The Wonder Years" in 2021 in downtown Montgomery. Photo by Brian S. Jones.

How to Promote Your Community as a Filming Location

Identify a contact person. Local cities and towns can also promote themselves as filming locations. One of the most important things a municipality can do in the process of becoming a prospective film location is to designate one person or office as the local contact. This local contact can then be shared with the state film office. Having a local contact is crucial because they are the best ones to have knowledge of their own communities. They can assist with everything from helping find specific locations, to working with the local mayor's office and other city departments, to making sure that all necessary local permits are in place for the production.

Update your municipal website! Local municipalities are encouraged to put their contact person on their website along with some verbiage about the community being open to host film projects. Listing this on the city or town's municipal website helps that community show up on Google searches when producers are looking for areas to film. The website should also tell what the community is known for and what makes it unique – what's the "charm factor"? Posting photos of various locations around the community is also recommended. Much of this information can likely be repurposed from what the community has probably already created to market the area to tourists. The same type of things that would interest a tourist such as historic neighborhoods, a revitalized downtown area, unique architecture, a nearby lake or mountain are also features that would attract a film production.

List your municipality on the Film Office location database. Municipalities, local individuals and business owners can also directly list properties with the Alabama Film Office as a possible location on the office's website database. This location database is what the state film office pulls from when being contacted for a potential film project. It is also available to anyone who visits the film office's website. Producers often search through this database on their own just to see if an area has anything that will match their needs before ever contacting the state film office. Listing a property can easily be done by going to the state film office's website at www.alabamafilm.org and creating an account under the "Locations" section. The website allows you to upload multiple photos and enter a description of the location. It also allows you to go in at any time and edit or remove the listing.

The Alabama Film Office also maintains a similar database for people interested in working on a film production. This can be anyone from a trained camera operator, a sound person or someone who has a local catering company that would like to provide food for the production. Interested Alabama residents can enter their job information directly with the state film office by going on www.alabamafilm.org and creating an account under the "Production Directory" section.

Look to see even more of the "Made in Alabama" logo being featured on the credits of movies and television shows in 2022. Interest in the state from the film industry continues to grow with several projects currently underway and more set for filming. Each project bringing money, jobs, and publicity to local communities. ■

MADE IN ALABAMA

RECENT ALABAMA PRODUCTION HIGHLIGHTS

TELEVISION

- "Home Town Takeover" (Wetumpka) 2021 – HGTV network and streaming on Discovery +
- "The Wonder Years" (Montgomery) ongoing – ABC network and streaming on Hulu
- "Love & Marriage: Huntsville" ongoing – OWN network and streaming on Discovery+

FILM

- "The Devil All The Time" starring Tom Holland and Robert Pattinson (Birmingham, Anniston, Jacksonville) 2020 – streaming on Netflix
- "Lansky" starring Harvey Keitel (Mobile, Gulf Shores, Orange Beach) 2021 – streaming on Amazon Prime
- "The Map of Tiny Perfect Things" starring Kathryn Newton (Fairhope) 2021– streaming on Amazon Prime
- "Die Like Lovers" starring Bruce Willis (Birmingham) – to be released 2022
- "About My Father" starring Robert De Niro (Mobile) – to be released 2022
- "Castle Falls" starring Dolph Lundgren (Birmingham) – to be released 2022

Brian S. Jones serves as the Media & Location Coordinator for the Alabama Film Office. Among his responsibilities are matching film production needs to locations across the state and acting as a liaison with the media. He also helps coordinate filming on any state-owned properties including state buildings, universities and Alabama State Parks. Before joining the Alabama Film Office he was in the public relations department of the Alabama Tourism Department for 18 years. He served as project manager for the award-winning Year of Alabama Arts and Year of Alabama Food campaigns. Jones graduated from the University of North Alabama with a degree in public relations and the University of Alabama with a master's degree in Advertising and Public Relations. He also completed a study program in entertainment marketing at the Disney Institute and the University of Central Florida while working for The Walt Disney Company.

Certified Local Government Status Opens Doors to Economic Growth

Wendi Lewis • Marketing and Public Relations Manager
Alabama Historical Commission

Achieving Certified Local Government (CLG) status assists local governments to strengthen their historic preservation efforts. But preserving the past doesn't mean standing still. Through the CLG program, managed by the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) in concert with the National Park Service (NPS), cities, towns, and municipalities unlock economic development opportunities through access to grant funding, technical and city planning assistance, resources for tourism, business development and reinvestment in historic districts.

"There are proven economic, environmental, and social benefits to retaining historic properties and having historic districts." said Paige Thomas, CLG Coordinator for the AHC. "They help communities attract population, develop tourism, and help maintain property values. When buildings are put back in use, more tax revenue is generated."

The CLG program was established in 1983 by the National Park Service in response to the 1980 amendments to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. These amendments recognized the value of local preservation programs and created a partnership between the NPS, state historic preservation offices and local governments with an active preservation program. Alabama currently has 34 CLGs.

Benefits of becoming a CLG include:

1. Historic preservation – Creating a historic district is an obvious benefit to becoming a CLG. But historic preservation isn't just about saving old buildings. Communities that pursue CLG status open the door to economic development opportunities and a wealth of local planning and development tools. The AHC can assist in accomplishing those goals as a point of contact and a liaison with NPS.
    a. Technical assistance – As the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), we can help CLGs add a historic preservation planning component to city planning activities. The SHPO offers guidance with building assessments, surveys, and nominations to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage and the National Register of Historic Places. We can also offer guidance to CLG communities that wish to utilize State and Federal Historic Tax Credits.
    b. Training – We provide information about our grant program and provide opportunities for networking with other CLG cities to make connections and share ideas. We connect CLGs with preservation contacts and planning departments in other cities and towns.
2. Sustainability – The rehabilitation of historic buildings is not inexpensive, but the return you can get on those dollars helps offset those expenses and it can offer an increase in investment and reinvestment in those areas.
3. Funding – The Alabama Historical Commission receives an annual appropriation from the Federal Historic Preservation Fund, of which we are required to give 10% to CLGs in the form of subgrants. These are matching grants, so the city, town or municipality would need to supply 40% of the total grant amount requested in matching funds. But that doesn't necessarily have to be in all dollars. It can be in-kind – volunteer or staff hours. Subgrants may be used for:
    a. Surveying historic properties for overall planning.

b. Producing National Register nominations.
c. Rehabilitation work if it meets stipulations set forth by the grant program.
d. Development of design review guidelines.
e. Creation of educational materials such as walking tours, tour apps, booklets, and brochures.
f. Training, both virtual and in-person.
g. Historic Structure Reports for rehabilitation or reinvestment.
h. Feasibility studies related to local review, property values in the city, developing a historic district.

The AHC can provide guidance to survey and document communities for historic buildings or a historic district. Properties must retain historic integrity and have significance to be considered a contributing resource in a historic district according to NPS standards. The AHC maintains a map on its website of historic properties throughout the state. This is a great resource for communities to find out if there are already properties or districts listed to begin the planning process. The searchable map is available at ahc.alabama.gov/historicpreservationmap.aspx.

Cities must meet three main requirements to become certified as a CLG.

1. Enact a historic preservation ordinance and establish a local preservation commission to enforce the ordinance. The commission must meet a minimum of four times a year. The commission also oversees any National Register nominations for review and comment; can make comments on Section 106 projects; and nominate areas to be National Register districts through the city, town, or municipality. They do not necessarily have to require design review of a historic district or enforcement, but we encourage it to maintain architectural integrity.
2. Submit an annual report to the State office. The report details how many board members serve on the commission and provides resumes of any new members. We offer direction for CLGs to prepare their annual report.
3. Commission members must participate in training at least once a year, which can be either virtual or in-person.

"A community doesn't have to be a CLG to establish a historic preservation commission, but we really encourage it because why not have more opportunities for training, assistance, and grant funding?" Thomas said. "The CLG program does not require a preservation professional as the contact. We have CLG programs that were established by a city clerk, or someone from city planning."

CLG programs have many partners at the national, state, and local level. The National Park Service, National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, and National Trust for Historic Preservation are a few of many that provide educational resources and technical assistance.

The Alabama Historical Commission is the State Historic Preservation Office and is the first contact for information about becoming a CLG. The AHC also manages and promotes the CLG program and CLG grant program. Other state partners include Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE), Your Town Alabama, Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation, Alabama Association of Historians, and Main Street Alabama. These organizations provide community development assistance and training with a focus on historic places.

Local partners are the most important and include city government, local or county historical societies, downtown organizations, neighborhood organizations, and planning commissions. Together these groups work toward high quality documentation of resources throughout the community, training local preservation commission members, and public involvement.

For more information, contact Paige Thomas, CLG Coordinator for the Alabama Historical Commission, at paige.thomas@ahc.alabama.gov or 334-230-2643. ■

Wendi Lewis is the Marketing & PR Manager for the Alabama Historical Commission. Her background includes journalism, with a focus on feature writing and community news reporting and editing, book publishing and project management, public relations communications, advertising copy writing, copyediting, and website content writing and management. In her role with the AHC, Wendi is dedicated to promoting the agency's mission to protect, preserve and interpret Alabama's historic places.

Certified Local Government Status Provides the Power for Your Plans

Wendi Lewis • Marketing and Public Relations Manager
Alabama Historical Commission

Prattville • Decatur • Mobile • Huntsville

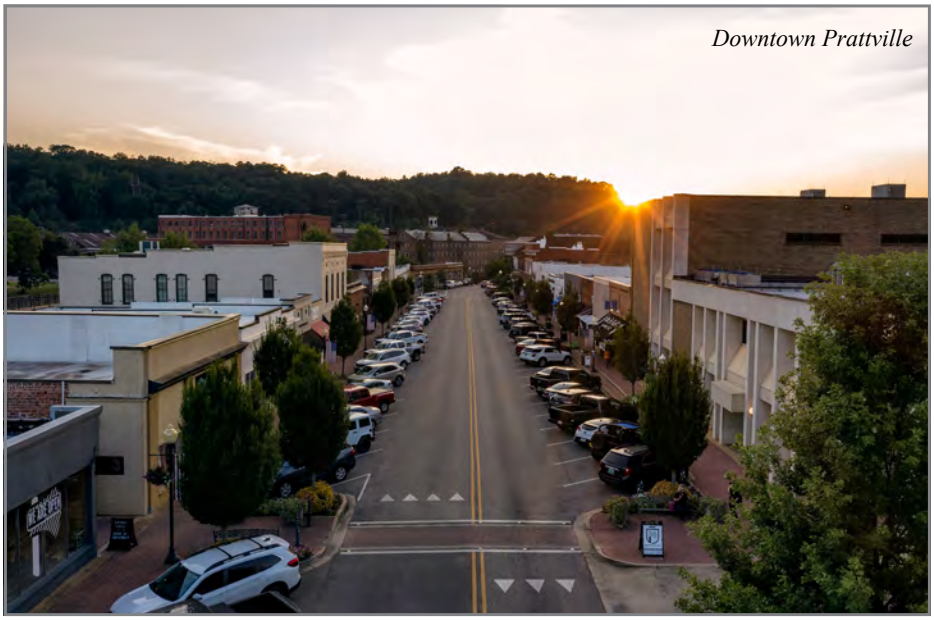
The process for obtaining Certified Local Government (CLG) status is open to cities, towns, and certified municipalities in Alabama. The Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) is the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and is the first contact on information about becoming a CLG. The AHC also manages and promotes the CLG program and CLG grant program. While there are a few steps to obtain CLG status, and requirements to maintain it, the benefits to participating communities are valuable.

What can CLG status do for you? Here's what a few communities around the state had to say:

PRATTVILLE

Prattville obtained CLG status very recently, at the end of December 2020. Prattville already had a strong historic preservation commission in place, which made the process painless.

"The process to apply for CLG status is very straightforward," said Scott Stephens, Planning Director for the City of Prattville. "You have to gather information about your historic buildings and districts, identify commissioners and meet several times a year. But if you have an existing historical commission like Prattville did, and you're up to date, achieving CLG status shouldn't be hard to do and it's a valuable thing to do."



Downtown Prattville

Although Prattville has been a CLG city for just a year, Stephens said it has already benefitted from resources and information about historic planning and preservation, and from the availability of grants. The city has been awarded two grants, one to fund training for its commissioners and another to update its historic guidelines.

"Prattville has a great history and a lot of citizens here are eager to preserve and protect that. It certainly helps to have the support of citizens as well as elected officials," Stephens said.

Under the guidance of their historic preservation commission, Prattville has thoughtfully developed its historic downtown, preserving historic structures while also fostering new investment and economic development. Another major project currently underway is the development of the Daniel Pratt Gin Company site, which is being converted to residential apartments.

The Daniel Pratt Gin Company was founded in 1833 and Pratt began manufacturing in 1836. He started making cotton gins, then expanded to establish a spinning plant, a sash and door mill, a foundry and lumber yard. Daniel Pratt founded Prattville in 1839. He was one of the South's first industrialists.

"I think sometimes on the surface people think they just want to tear down and rebuild new," Stephens said. "But preserving the true and unique history we have benefits everyone. Downtown Prattville is an attractive place and a

lot of that has to do with the preservation of our historic appearance. Buildings at the Daniel Pratt Gin Company date from 1848, and people will live there, walk downtown, spend time and visit our shops and merchants. It's very eagerly anticipated."

For more information about the Prattville CLG, contact J. Scott Stephens at 334-595-0501 or by email, scott.stephens@prattvilleal.gov.

DECATUR

The City of Decatur attained CLG status in 1991. Decatur owns five buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, ranging from the Old State Bank in the Bank Street - Old Decatur Historic District dating to the 1830s to the Princess Theatre, with its 1940s art deco façade. The city has five National Register historic districts, two with local status with design review – Bank Street - Old Decatur and Albany Residential.

"With buildings ranging from 1830 to the 1940s, as you can imagine there is a lot of difference in maintenance required by different historic properties," said Caroline T. Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D., Historic Preservation Specialist for the City of Decatur. With an educational background in Historic Preservation, Architectural History and Preservation Economics, Dr. Swope has experience in historic surveys and inventory, securing grant funding and writing National Register nominations, among other work. "I'm acutely aware of the economic benefit of these buildings and their value. Preserving these buildings is a way of keeping those connections to the past and maintaining Decatur's unique identity," she says.

Above: Frank's Hardware Store, Old Decatur District.
Below: Princess Theater, Albany Historic District.
Photos by Patrick Hood

While having someone with such extensive expertise in historical preservation work is not necessary for a community to begin the process of applying for CLG status, it is certainly helpful. Dr. Swope suggests a team that includes people with professional knowledge, but also those with community knowledge – people who have lived in the place for a long time and can speak to its history from a personal experience perspective.

Access to grants is one of the most valuable benefits to securing CLG status, she says. "We recently used CLG grant money to resurvey a National Register district that hadn't been resurveyed since the 1980s," she explained. "The reason that's important is we often look for tax credits with our historic buildings – federal when combined with state historic tax credits can cover up to 45% of a building's rehabilitation costs. Without an up-to-date survey, it's like having an old doctor's note from 20 years ago saying you're in good health."

The new survey helped secure tax credits for a planned $7 million project, which would not have been possible without updated paperwork. Decatur also has used grant funds for educational materials.

"This goes back to communal history – people who have lived in Decatur for years know why this building or that one is important, but how do you teach newcomers?" Dr. Swope said.

The City partnered with the school system to create an

activity and coloring book for all fourth-grade students, highlighting 20 important buildings spanning the past 200 years. In addition to the more familiar buildings from the two historic districts, like the Old Bank and the Princess Theatre, the City included places like the First Missionary Baptist Church, designed by prominent African American architect W.A. Rayfield in 1921; the Alabama Farmers Cooperative, whose establishment led to the formation of the statewide farmers cooperative; a cotton factory that represents early industry in the city; a 1970s wave pool, and a neon sign for Bob Gibson BBQ.

The City partnered with the Decatur Downtown Development Authority, which purchased packages of crayons for every 4th grade student in the district. The City Council sponsored a coloring contest with prizes, where children were asked to submit a page from the coloring book or their own original drawing, along with a short essay about why they chose the historic site and what the city means to them.

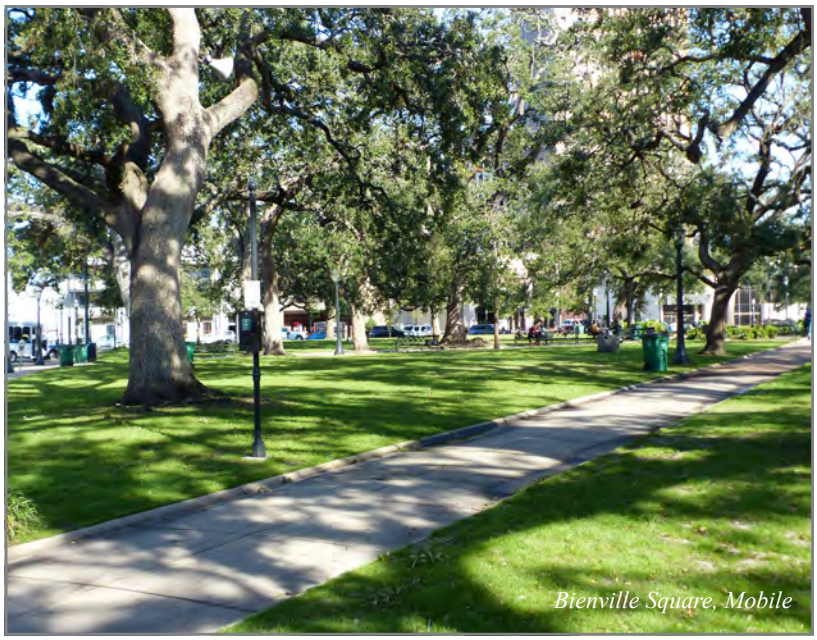
Other grant-funded projects have included a historic window restoration workshop, and staff and commissioner training, where they partnered with other nearby CLG cities for affordability and to share ideas and resources. The City is also evaluating applying for CLG funding to survey the architectural history of neighborhoods in the southwest area of the city.

"We are actively looking at ways to honor the city's history and access federal tax credit funds to help develop the city," Dr. Swope said.

For more information about the City of Decatur CLG, contact Caroline T. Swope, M.S.H.P., Ph.D., Historic Preservation Specialist, City of Decatur, at 256-476-7520 (cell), 256-341-4968 (land line) or email cswope@decatur-al.gov.

MOBILE

The City of Mobile attained CLG status in 1985. After working in municipal government before becoming Deputy Director of Build Mobile for the Mobile Historic Development Commission, Christine Dawson identified two main opportunities provided by the city's CLG status – grant funding and technical assistance.


Bienville Square, Mobile

"As someone who works with our architectural review board, I feel my most important job is to help property owners achieve their goals with the property while preserving the character of the historic districts they are in," she said. "Multiple studies show properties in these districts tend to maintain value over time better than properties without that type of review for changes required."

She said the key to a successful partnership between economic development and historic preservation is a willingness to work together. She said developers often approach regulatory review with negative expectations, when really all that is needed is a fresh set of eyes.

"I think it's surprising to some applicants who expect to get a lot of 'No' from us, but if I think something isn't in accord, I do have ideas for a different way to achieve the goal," Dawson said. "Of course, we want to see our city grow and historic areas revitalized. There's actually someone willing to help them."

Most recently, Mobile used historic preservation fund grants to help with the research and writing for the National Register nomination for *Clotilda* and two other shipwreck sites in the Mobile River. *Clotilda* is a substantially intact, submerged and partially buried shipwreck and archaeological site that is the last vessel known to have transported captives from Africa to the United States to enslave them. The story of this vessel is an important touchpoint in collective memory. Clotilda was added to the National Register Nov. 8, 2021.

CLG grant funding also is being used for a multi-year project to digitize reams of individual property records for designated historic districts. This project will keep these documents safe and make them accessible to the public.

"It keeps me up at night – what would we lose if something happened to all these paper files?" Dawson said. "Also, we have a lot of people contacting us looking for information about their property and their families and their history. Making these records available digitally will let people peruse our records at their leisure, at home in their pajamas."

Just as valuable as access to funding, the CLG program provides technical assistance for surveys to protect and preserve other historic properties. For example, Dawson called on Lyn Causey, who oversees the National Register program for the Alabama Historical Commission, when development was proposed to update Mobile's historic Bienville Square, which was established in 1847.

"I was able to call Lyn and say, 'We want to do x, y and z – what are the character defining features of this landscape the City needs to maintain so the property maintains its integrity and that doesn't threaten the contributing status it provides to the historic district?' This informed the plan for the updates that don't threaten its historic integrity," Dawson said.

She said she plans to call on other resources of the SHPO as the City identifies new potential historic properties and districts that may be eligible for historic preservation. These efforts protect what makes Mobile unique, while keeping an eye on developing a healthy future.

For more information about the Mobile CLG, contact Christine Dawson at 251-208-7281 or by email, christine.dawson@cityofmobile.org.

HUNTSVILLE

The City of Huntsville attained CLG status in 1985. Without a doubt, access to grants is a benefit of CLG status that provides continuity and a certain security for historic preservation and development, says Katie Stamps, Preservation Planner for the City of Huntsville.

The city uses grant funds most often for surveys, such as historic resource surveys to determine the eligibility of a historic district for a National Register listing, and for consulting to assist with the development of a heritage development plan.

Edmonton Heights Historic District. Photo by Caroline Swope

"CLG status is very easy to maintain," Stamps said. "The program is pretty straightforward, with the same things expected of us each year. Available grants are announced each year, and the process for applying, turning in materials and allocation is clear. It's nice to know there is a steady opportunity to receive grant funding. This lets me take a look at what districts we may want to survey, or plan for training we may need for our commissioners."

Since 2016, the City of Huntsville has begun surveying mid-Century resources with an eye toward identifying new historic districts and applying for National Register listings. In particular, the City hopes to expand its documentation of Black historic sites. CLG grants made it possible for Huntsville to survey six mid-Century neighborhoods. One of them, Edmonton Heights, was added to the National Register in 2021.

"We're excited about this opportunity to expand documentation for Black historic sites, areas associated with the Black community in Huntsville," Stamps said. "So much of this information is out there, but we have not been able to collect it before or there hasn't been a focus on collecting it. These surveys are allowing us to collect this historical information in one place and connect it. It allows the city to build our history in a broader way."

Huntsville is currently in the early stages of surveying another mid-Century neighborhood, Magnolia Terrace. Stamps also is talking with Alabama Historical Commission staff about the possibility of planning a National Register Multiple Property survey that would collect the data gathered in these early surveys and expand on it.

"I love this program," Stamps said. "It gives us a game plan and provides resources to help me do my job."

For more information about the Huntsville CLG, contact Katie Stamps at 256-650-4779 or by email at katherine.stamps@huntsvilleal.gov. ■

Editor's note: See p. 26 for Wendi Lewis' bio.

BUILDING ECONOMIC SUCCESS THROUGH NEW INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

TRISHA BLACK • MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER • MAIN STREET ALABAMA

The economic success of downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts is essential in the over-all health of communities across the United States. Serving as the city center, those districts often house a variety of uses including municipal offices, religious institutions, retail, restaurants, professional firms, personal services and residential living.

Through new initiatives, Main Street Alabama is working in our designated communities to find the best uses of available spaces and understanding what the market will support – particularly as we move past the pandemic and more entrepreneurs are ready to jump start their businesses.

Through a partnership with Opportunity Alabama (OPAL) and the Business Council of Alabama (BCA), funded through an Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant, Main Street Alabama is providing services to our designated communities during the next 28 months in one of the following areas: small scale production, redevelopment planning or incremental development.

"Working in concert with OPAL and BCA has been a wonderful experience," said Mary Helmer Wirth, President and State Coordinator, Main Street Alabama. "We are learning from one another and are utilizing the best of each our organizations to move businesses in Alabama forward. We are all stronger for our partnership and are looking forward to working together on current and future projects."

As of the end of 2021, services were rendered in Montevallo, Woodlawn, Opelika and Florence.

Small Scale Production

Montevallo and Woodlawn received a small-scale production service in October 2021, facilitated by Matt Wagner, Chief Program Officer of the National Main Street Center. As small production finds its home in downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts, it is time communities start reviewing their zoning to allow small scale manufacturing and begin carving out space for those makers, often already working out of their home. Those producers can include everything from bakers, wig makers, brewers, quilters, metal artists and more.

During these visits, Matt met with Main Street staff, volunteers and city officials to discuss avenues to discover regional talent and then toured available spaces to determine what would make a good fit. Matt also had the opportunity to meet with local and regional producers that have already found success working out of a space. These producers discussed the challenges

Opelika residents tour available downtown properties.

Main Street Wetumpka's Small Box Shop, the Tourist Trap, opened in April 2021 in downtown Wetumpka and is serving the needs of the increasing number of tourists visiting the city after the launch of the highly rated HGTV makeover series that featured the city.

they faced and what support was missing in the process. Producers working out of their homes and vending their items at Farmers Markets and other events discussed what is keeping them from taking the leap into a brick and mortar. Matt's final report will provide a framework for those Main Street programs to help build an ecosystem to fill in those missing pieces as they move forward in the cultivation of small-scale producers in their districts.

Redevelopment Planning

The Redevelopment Plan service has been provided to Opelika and Florence thus far. Joe Borgstrom, Principal, Place + Main Advisors, led the team during a three-day exercise that included visiting with property owners with vacancies, learning more about local development initiatives and future growth from city officials and the county economic developers. The community was also invited on a walking tour and asked to express what they'd like to see in those vacant spaces. At the wrap up meeting at the end of the visit, Joe reviews the market trends, including the retail pull and leakage from the district. The final report will include pro formas for those property owners who expressed an interest during the visit as well as direction for redevelopment in the district moving forward.

Incremental Development

Incremental Development is meant to teach individuals how to become their own developers and tackle small scale development projects that can collectively make a significant impact in their community. In December 2020, Main Street Alabama hosted a free webinar with Bernice Radle, owner of Buffalove Development and Little Wheel Restoration Company, that was a good tee up of what can be expected when these services roll out in 2022. A more intensive workshop is planned for the Spring of 2022.

For all those services mentioned above, our partner, Opportunity Alabama, will provide information on capital stacks and how to leverage funding for the projects identified through the process.

Small Box Shops

Another initiative in play is our Small Box Shops. Funded by a matching USDA grant, two storage containers outfitted for retail were placed in Heflin and Wetumpka in 2019. The roughly 100 square foot space is meant to serve as a place for entrepreneurs to test the market before investing in a building.

In Heflin (pop. 3,480), Southern Charms, a home décor boutique, made its debut in the Small Box Shop on Black Friday 2020. A group of women looking to try their hand at retail approached the Main Street program about utilizing the Small Box Shop. This gave the women an opportunity to test their products, and, by the end of the Christmas season, they had outgrown the space. They quickly decided to find a permanent space and invested in a brick and mortar in the district. Their business continues to grow.

"The Small Box Shop was a true blessing to us," said Sandy Sanders, Southern Charms co-owner. "It gave us an opportunity to explore our inventory and make changes along the way to accommodate the wants of our customers without investing too much. In doing so, our business had grown to a point where we were ready to make a storefront purchase that will fulfill one of our lifelong dreams."

Just two hours south in Wetumpka, you will find a city that is not just surviving but thriving. *Southern Living* proclaimed it is "Wetumpka's year to shine," and Main Street Wetumpka's Small Box Shop is at the helm. The Tourist Trap opened in April 2021 and is serving the needs of the increasing number of tourists visiting the city after the launch of the highly rated HGTV makeover series that featured Wetumpka.

The success of the Small Box Shops led to another funding round from USDA for units to be placed in Monroeville (pop. 5,878) and Marion (pop. 3,275) before the end of 2021. In preparation of the container placement in Monroeville, the Main Street program along with the local SBDC and Main Street Alabama, launched BUOY, Business Understanding & Ownership for Youth, for ages 15 to 25 to cultivate young entrepreneurs who can transition into the Small Box Shop. Entrepreneurs went through an application process that asked for their business idea and references. The group then completed courses covering topics from legal considerations, accounting best practices, human resources, financing and marketing. Providing these resources gives these future business owners a realistic understanding of what it will take to be successful in Monroeville's market.

License Plate Program

The last initiative to mention is the Shop Local Support Small license plate program. After receiving an extension, Main Street Alabama now has through January 31, 2022, to secure enough pre-commitments for the car tag to go into production. Funds raised from the pre-commitments will be used for $500 grants for qualifying small businesses in Alabama. To learn more about the car tag initiative, visit mainstreetalabama.org.

About Main Street Alabama

Main Street Alabama is a private non-profit and state coordinating program of Main Street America that stresses public-private partnerships, broad community engagement and strategies that create jobs, spark new investment, attract visitors and spur growth. Main Street builds on the authentic history, culture and attributes of specific places to bring sustainable change. The National Main Street Four Point Approach™ is an over 40-year model that focuses work in four areas: organization, design, promotion and economic vitality with strategies unique to the community and based on market-based outcomes.

Designated communities include Alexander City, Anniston, Athens, Atmore, Birmingham, Calera, Columbiana, Decatur, Dothan, Elba, Enterprise, Eufaula, Florence, Foley, Fort Payne, Gadsden, Headland, Heflin, Historic 4th Avenue Business District in Birmingham, Marion, Monroeville, Montevallo, Jasper, Opelika, Oxford, Scottsboro, South Huntsville, West Huntsville and Wetumpka. Each Designated community listed above reports their success by tracking their reinvestment statistics. Main Street Alabama's Designated communities have reported 877 net new businesses, 2,863 net new jobs, $571,321,812 in private investment, $94,667,497 in public improvements and 128,567 volunteer hours in their districts collectively since June of 2014.

Main Street programs are locally driven, funded, organized and run. They are independent nonprofits or city agencies located in the community and affiliated with Main Street Alabama and a network of other Main Street organizations within the state. Main Street Alabama hosts new city application workshops in January each year. Communities interested in learning more about the program are encouraged to join the Main Street Alabama Network. More information can be found at mainstreetalabama.org. ■

Trisha Black joined the Main Street Alabama staff as the Field Services Specialist in February 2016 after working as a local Main Street Director for over seven years in Athens, AL. In 2020, she transitioned into the role of Marketing and Communications Manager. During Black's tenure, Spirit of Athens became a state-designated and nationally accredited Main Street program. Along with dedicated volunteers, Black was the driving force behind several projects emulated both state-wide and nationally including the Athens Saturday Market, a state-certified farmers market, the Athens Grease Festival, an annual community event and fundraiser, and High Cotton Arts, a shared working space for up to 10 artists. Black received the 2014 Main Street Alabama Leadership Award, recognizing her for frequently sharing her knowledge of the Four Point Approach with both communities interested in downtown revitalization and other Main Street programs. In 2020, she earned her Main Street America Revitalization Professional certification from the National Main Street Center. She is a 1993 graduate of Troy University with a bachelor's degree in political science and journalism.

Alabama's Small Towns – A Perfect Living Democracy for College Interns

Dr. Mark Wilson • Director • Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities • Auburn University

Alabama's small towns and municipalities have a good shot at revolutionizing undergraduate education throughout the state by offering their authentic selves to institutions that desperately need them. *Small towns* and *revolutions* are not usually found in the same sentence, but before I try to explain, consider some Alabama-born statements on education by three different leaders from Alabama's past and present.

Marietta Johnson came to Alabama from St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1907 to begin the Organic School of Education in Fairhope -- a bold experiment implementing new ways of relating and acting with children. "Education must come into its own," she stated. "It must become the conscious agent for building a better world. It must be true to its high mission."

Deborah Cannon Wolfe came to Alabama from Cranston, New Jersey, in 1938, on invitation from the president of Tuskegee Institute, in part to develop a new school at the Prairie Farms Resettlement Community for residents who were relocated from what is now the Tuskegee National Forest. The school became the community center, and education was not limited to the classroom. "If education is to be of any real value," she said, "it must be based on all the experience of life."

Originally from Grove Hill, Alabama, David Mathews is president and chief executive officer of the Kettering Foundation, a research foundation based in Dayton, Ohio. Mathews served as president of the University of Alabama for two non-consecutive terms and as secretary of health, education and welfare under President Gerald Ford. In his book *Why Public Schools? Whose Public Schools?*, he asks foundational questions regarding the relationship of community members to their schools, and he suggests that "engagement has to occur first among citizens and later between citizens and schools." Institutional relationships grow out of human relationships, not vice versa.

All three of these distinguished, internationally recognized leaders are revolutionary in their thinking, yet they remind us what we've known all along: Public education is not public education without the public, and the role of communities is critical to individual and collective success. The role of communities is not limited to K-12 education, and, in fact, higher education needs small towns more than ever. Over the past several decades, universities have re-discovered high-impact practices like service-learning, practicum courses, study abroad, supervised internships and cooperative learning ventures for preparing students through real-world experiences for life and work.

Living Democracy – Collaboration with Communities

Over a decade ago, we launched a small, cooperative research experiment with the Kettering Foundation that included small towns in Alabama and undergraduate students from a variety of academic disciplines. Auburn University is a land-grant university, part of the historic, American experiment to educate citizens who were previously excluded due to cost, location, and other biases. Auburn, in collaboration with Alabama A&M University, has a presence in all 67 counties as part of its "extension" mission. Collaboration with communities, therefore, is part of our institutional and cultural fabric. Colleague Nan Fairley, associate professor of journalism, and I named the experiment Living Democracy, and Ralph Foster of University Outreach and undergraduate student Rachel Naftel helped chart the course for the new venture.

Intern Lauren Landers lived democracy in Camden.

We invited representatives from seven communities into the conversation with a question: "If we can find an undergraduate student who would like to live in your community for 10 weeks during the summer, *what could they learn from that experience*?" They were a little surprised at the question, since institutional representatives generally start a conversation on

Intern Jelani Moore lived democracy in Elba.

collaboration with the question, "What *needs* do you have that we can help address?" Understanding needs is important in any relationship, but that shouldn't be the starting point. For too long, big institutions have seen small towns as half-empty, rather than half-full. Universities are particularly guilty of this approach. One participant at that gathering said: "Our town is used to researchers doing research on us, but then we rarely even find out the results. You are asking us to share what we've learned with others, and that's refreshing" (my paraphrase).

We pair Living Democracy students with a community for 10 weeks, and students serve as Jean O'Conner-Snyder interns with our partner organization, the David Mathews Center for Civic Life during that period of time. In interviews for the positions, students often ask, "What will I be doing?" Our answer: "We don't know exactly until we've listened to the communities to understand what they are currently working on, what they've been hoping to achieve of late and what experiences are available to you this summer." Students have a primary community organization as sort of a home-base, but we ask them to fill their time in ways that align their personal and professional interests with the opportunities available during the 10 weeks.

Some of their time is spent researching and writing stories for publication on our site, **www.auburn.edu/livingdemocracy**, often in a journalist style but sometimes simply reflecting on an experience. We ask students to find stories, or, as often happens, "let them find you." Important human stories of civic action and problem solving are all around us if we will just take the time to see them. Students write about organizations, "sacred" spaces, uncommon or unheralded leaders, interesting community assets and examples of community members coming together to solve a shared problem. They learn to interview, frame stories, improve their writing skills over the course of the summer and honor local people with their words and reflection.

Working with college students is always an adventure, and we enjoy watching them grow and develop their civic muscles over the course of their participation in the program. Blake Evans lived democracy in Linden, Alabama, living above the volunteer fire station and holding a desk at City Hall. Interested in public administration, he asked the police chief if he could ride along with an officer on a Friday night, and he asked the water works crew if he could help read meters during the day. His "project" related to economic development, but he learned that every aspect of civic life contributes to the economic development of a town.

Jelani Moore lived democracy in Elba, Alabama, and one night on our weekly conference call with students, he reported that he would be investigating a local murder for a story. That's not the typical topic for student stories, so I asked with great concern the details of the project. The victim was the town rooster, grieved by many in Elba when one day all that remained was a pile of feathers. Despite interviewing more than a few canines as suspects, Jelani did not solve the murder, but he wrote a story on the meaning of the rooster to the town, one that was published in the local, weekly paper.

Lauren Landers lived democracy in Camden, Alabama, this past summer, and she got to know a member of the town council who wanted to provide mentoring activities for young people in an area of her district. Lauren discovered that the young people could benefit from athletic equipment, so she wrote a number of university athletic departments in the state, several of which provided their gently-used professional grade equipment. She also organized a fundraiser for additional supplies, exceeding the goal, thanks to both local community members and people within her network.

Colleagues in higher education often ask me how and when we are going to scale Living Democracy so that scores of communities and students can participate. I suspect we would not turn down a $1,000,000 endowment to do so (call if you'd like to write a check), but we currently have no plans to scale the work because of philosophical and practical reasons. I would rather encourage communities to create and maintain their own programs, since they have all the necessary and limitless puzzle pieces within their town limits.

Possible steps for beginning a living-learning opportunity in your community.

1. Consider your town a classroom, full of educational possibilities for college students. Your town is unique, and

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Immersive Civic Learning Experiences for College Students Across Alabama

Staff • David Mathews Center for Civic Life

One key component of the work of the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC) is partnering with institutions of higher education to provide immersive civic learning opportunities for college students. At the Mathews Center, we believe that providing opportunities for young adults to build civic skills and exercise civic dispositions is vital to creating and preserving a healthy democracy where citizens are involved as *actors* rather than *spectators*, and as *producers* rather than *consumers*.

Over the past decade, a call has gone out for a renewed focus in higher education on preparing young adults not only for a career, but also for citizenship. A growing number of articles, research and best practices on civic learning have made one thing clear: young people in the United States need more opportunities to engage in active civic learning – civic learning that goes beyond the passive receipt of knowledge. Young adults need opportunities to immerse themselves within a community to apply and improve their civic knowledge while working alongside citizens on community-based projects.

Immersive civic learning offers a more holistic approach to civic education. This approach distinguishes itself from traditional civics education typically characterized by civics courses designed by textbooks, classroom instruction and completing numerous service hours. Immersive civic learning is characterized by active, continuous participation in formal and informal civic and community experiences in a particular place and/or with a particular group or organization.

Guilefoile, Delander and Kreck stress the importance of engaging youth in active civic learning practices in *Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning.* Young people, they claim, "can only learn how to be civically engaged by *being* civically engaged."[1] The Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools outlines four key civic competencies young people must develop to be prepared for active citizenship, which include civic knowledge, civic intellectual skills, civic participatory skills and civic dispositions.[2]

At the Mathews Center, we often talk about the concept of "communities as classrooms." That is, the ability of our public spaces, nonprofit organizations, informal associations and elected leaders to provide educational experiences beyond the scope of the classroom that prepare students for their future as citizens. Placing value in this idea of communities as classrooms, the Mathews Center partners with colleges and universities across the state to provide experiential learning opportunities for undergraduates through our Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP).

Alabamians must work together, not just inside the lecture halls of academic institutions, but also within our communities, to develop civic learning initiatives and programs geared toward developing the civic skills of young adults to prepare them to be active citizens. A core belief behind the JOIP program is that institutions of higher education can and should play a role in producing active citizens. Working with institutions of higher education across Alabama, the JOIP program offers college students the opportunity to learn how to be civically engaged through immersive internship experiences.

JOIP interns visit the Legacy Museum in Montgomery during a 2020 David Mathews Center (DMC) retreat. Photo by DMC.

About the Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program

The Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP) was designed around the goal of transforming college students into active members of a community and is the longest-running program of the Mathews Center. The JOIP program provides immersive civic learning opportunities

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Living Democracy intern Melissa Dennis and friends in Chatom, Alabama.

there's not another one just like it. Business owners teach entrepreneurship each time they put a new idea into action. The volunteers at the local museum or historical society hold classes in genealogical and document research with each new visitor. The town clerk understands the complexity of local government like none other, and the public library is sometimes a visitor center, chamber of commerce and information technology center under a single roof.

2. Find a pathway into a college or university. Scaling the walls of the ivory tower can be daunting, so develop relational pathways until you find the contact who can put you in touch with faculty and students who've been looking for you but didn't know it. Some academic programs require internships with strict guidelines, while others provide flexibility for students to identify their own partners and placement. Whether credit bearing or not, students need more than just department store or restaurant experience in the summer. They need *you*.

3. Take stock of your assets and create a unique opportunity for a student. Your organization will likely be the primary organization but conceptualize the internship as one where students experience your entire community, not just the ins and outs of one organization. Invite a hospitable family or individual to provide housing or uncover an asset that has been there all along for this purpose. Volunteer firehouse apartments tend to satisfy male students, especially if they can receive training and include volunteer firefighter training on their resume! Recruit organizations and individuals to sponsor a stipend for the student. Don't get into this for free labor like some businesses and organizations have done that take advantage of young people in this way.

4. Tell the story. Colleges and universities thrive on stories of success, and students deserve recognition from their school for their contributions to your community. Tag university departments in social media posts and write old-fashioned letters with stamps to school administrators. After your local paper writes a nice story on your student, send copies to the school along with information regarding your town. Invite administrators to visit your town and the student during the summer and ask your student to give them the VIP tour of his or her adopted town.

Small towns matter, and many are full of creativity, innovation and willingness to think strategically about the future. The college students near your town have these qualities as well, and they need real-world experiences to understand how citizens come together to address shared concerns and opportunities. They need a chance to learn from your town's successes and challenges, and they need to see what long-term commitment to a place and its people looks like. You will contribute to their formation as leaders, and they will remind you that your town matters. And in the process, you will fulfill Marietta Johnson's vision for democratic education, "the conscious agent for building a better world." ■

Dr. Mark Wilson is Director of Community Engagement and the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts & Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University. He holds degrees from the University of Mobile (B.A. Religion), McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University (Master of Divinity) and Auburn University (Ph.D. History). He is the author of William Owen Carver's Controversies in the Baptist South *(Mercer University), co-author of* Living Democracy: Students as Citizens, Communities as Classrooms *(Kettering Foundation Press) and several articles. Wilson is an Appalachian Teaching Fellow with the Appalachian Regional Commission and Secretary of the Alabama Historical Association. His teaching duties at Auburn University include Introduction to Community and Civic Engagement and practicum courses which provide living-learning experiences for students in Alabama communities and beyond. In 2018, he was voted by students at Auburn University to deliver the "Final Lecture," an award coordinated by the Student Government Association. He has coordinated contracts and grants with the National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, Appalachian Regional Commission, Kettering Foundation, David Mathews Center for Civic Life, Alabama Humanities Foundation and others. He is a former member of the Board of Directors for the National Issues Forums Institute.*

Collinsville: Small Town Alabama Through the Eyes of an Intern

Hannah White • Auburn University Living Democracy Participant and JOIP Intern

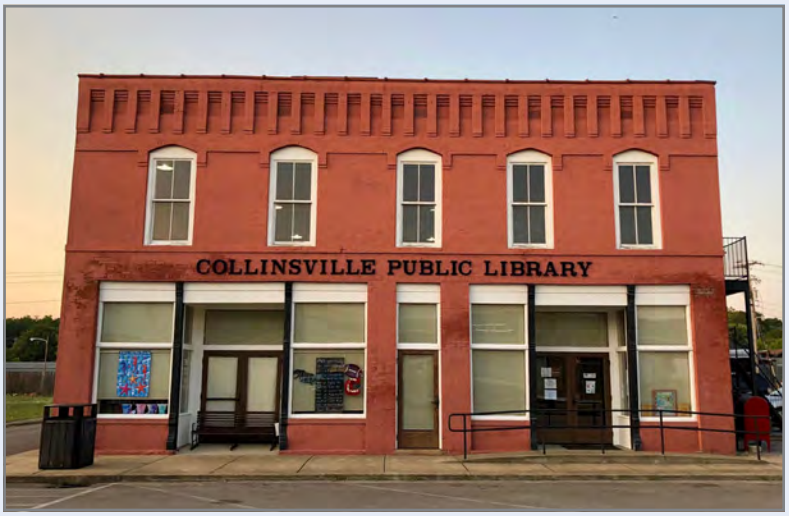
Small towns are portrayed in many ways. They can come off as quirky, cozy sanctuaries for people or be seen as close-knitted and wary of outsiders. Before I participated in Auburn University's Living Democracy program, I held similar views about small towns, specifically in my home state of Alabama. I thought of them as places where their values opposed my own. However, through my personal experience with Living Democracy, my mind was completely changed.

Living Democracy is a unique program that works with communities to facilitate a meaningful exchange of ideas and projects, all through the work of an undergraduate student. In 2019, I was assigned to the community of Collinsville, a town of about 2,000 citizens located in DeKalb County. Situated in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, I was excited to live in a place that looked different from my hometown of Madison, at least topographically. The public library, Living Democracy's community partner, is located on Main Street as one of the few occupied buildings. Downtown Collinsville is home to two Mexican grocers, a hardware store and the historic Cricket Theatre, but there are multiple empty storefronts sprinkled in as well. Down the street is the Piggly Wiggly, a Dollar General and the local school. There isn't much to Collinsville in a physical sense, but the people of this town make up for its lack of buildings.

When I first arrived in Collinsville, I was quite nervous. I'm not from a small town and I had no idea who I would meet over the next 10 weeks. I had a vague idea of some projects I'd be part of, but there were more questions than answers. Living Democracy students not only work in their communities for 10 weeks, but they also live with a local host family. Once I got situated at my host's home, I was able to be in the library and really meet the people I would grow to love.

Prior to my summer in Collinsville, I had very minimal experience in creating projects and facilitating them. Most of my jobs and internships up to that point had been task-based and with plenty of direction, so the flexibility of my Living Democracy summer was somewhat intimidating to me, at least at the beginning. I wouldn't have considered myself someone with creativity in ideas or the knowledge to pull together events, but over the summer I learned that I had these skills, and more.

Since the community partner for Collinsville is the public library, each year the Living Democracy student is responsible for two (or more) weeks of the summer reading program. I would be no different, and I got to craft hour-long sessions to teach the children of Collinsville about Alabama history, since we were celebrating the state's bicentennial. I've always loved Alabama and enjoyed coming up with stories and crafts to teach about our state facts and the events that shaped our communities. Through this work, I gained skills such as researching, lesson planning and public speaking. I had some previous experience in these fields, but by creating the programs for two weeks, I was able to bring them into reality and that was helpful for me.



Collinsville Public Library, which serves as the community's partner for the Living Democracy JOIP program.

Along with working at the library, I was also involved with the Collinsville Historical Association (CHA) and their museum – the Museum of Collinsville History, which is right down the road from the library. I hadn't anticipated working alongside the citizens of the CHA, but I quickly joined their group and became a weekly-meeting participant, as well as assisting them with displays and even creating a website for them. I have always appreciated museums but had never worked in display creation, which I enjoyed. I also learned about cataloguing and was able to cold-call town members to gather information for the large museum project – 100 years of Collinsville High School football.

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Immersive Civic Learning

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for Alabama undergraduates. Through JOIP, college students learn about and apply deliberative practices and asset-based approaches while working alongside Alabama communities in capacity-building projects.

The Mathews Center administers the JOIP program and collaborates with faculty mentors at partnering colleges and universities across the state to recruit students to participate as a JOIP intern. The internship is open to students in all disciplines with past interns representing a variety of majors. It is our belief that immersive civic learning experiences can be applied to any field of study.

Many JOIP internships function as domestic study abroad experiences where students live and work for several weeks in a partnering Alabama community. Other interns work on yearlong, intensive assignments with a partner organization or in support of the Mathews Center's statewide programs. Past internship projects have explored the potential for deliberative practices in the fields of education, economic development, public health, arts and humanities, community media and religious communities.

Each partnering school's JOIP program is unique in its objectives and its scope; however, the overall program is rooted in its goal to increase immersive civic learning in Alabama communities. Through JOIP, the Mathews Center encourages the development of civic skills, competencies, and dispositions as outlined in the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. Furthermore, we seek to strengthen young adults' sense of civic efficacy and provide professional development for college students, particularly in community-based collaboration and communication skills.

The Jean O'Connor Snyder Internship Program is lovingly named in honor of Jean O'Connor-Snyder, or "Mrs. O'C", to the Capstone Men and Women at the University of Alabama who were directed by Jean from 1969 until 1975. Beginning in the 1970s, Jean O'Connor-Snyder was a cherished mentor to undergraduates both in school and in their subsequent careers. The JOIP program is an effort to extend her legacy and provide experiences similar to those of UA student interns in the 1970s who served under the direction of David Mathews, then president of the University. Through JOIP, we seek to extend Mrs. O'Connor-Snyder's legacy by supporting asset-based approaches to community development and capacity-building at the local level.

Highlighting Recent JOIP Projects

The Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program builds upon the next generation's spirit of connection and civic engagement by developing the next generation of Alabama leaders. The 2021 JOIP interns can be characterized as being determined, passionate, and technologically very savvy! We wish we could share highlights from each of the JOIP interns from this most recent cohort; however, we were able to narrow it down to a small handful to share with you. The following articles are written by both DMC staff and recent JOIP interns highlighting JOIP internships with partnering communities and schools across Alabama. We hope you enjoy reading about these immersive civic learning experiences in Alabama communities! ▪

Endnotes

[1] Lisa Guilfoile & Brady Delander, *Guidebook: Six Proven Practices for Effective Civic Learning*, 2016.

[2] Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, "Civic Competencies." Web. Accessed 11/6/2014. Link: http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/educators/civic-competencies

David Mathews Center for Civic Life

The David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works every day to strengthen civic life in Alabama by partnering with schools, communities, nonprofit organizations, elected officials and concerned citizens to increase active citizenship and community collaboration through community forums, workshops and youth civic learning opportunities. Visit **www.mathewscenter.org** to learn more.

Rachel Naftel Mosness is the Executive Director of the DMC. A native of Birmingham, AL, Rachel graduated from Auburn University in 2011 with a BA in Liberal Arts. She then spent one year teaching English in Redon, France followed by two years in Paris where she pursued her MA in International Relations and Diplomacy at The American Graduate School. Rachel had the opportunity to work in the education sector at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and completed an internship for the State Department at the American embassy. She moved to Auburn in 2015 to pursue her Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy while working in various capacities for the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities at Auburn University. During that time, Rachel worked closely with the Mathews Center on various projects including assisting with Auburn University's involvement with the Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program. She can be reached at rmosness@mathewscenter.org.

Jasper: What Can You Share from Your Lunchbox?

Virginia Saft • University of Alabama/New College Student and JOIP Intern

Strewn across a terraced lawn, families have gathered to watch *Mary Poppins* at the Bankhead House. We arrive before dusk to set up our picnic blankets, the faint smell of popcorn wafting over moviegoers establishing their spots. Introductions are made; hands are shaken; one of our fellow interns, who has on Bert the chimney sweep's striped suit, tips his hat to people who pass by. The scene here is that of a happy community, children leaning against parents as the sun sets and the movie begins. The event, in short, is picturesque.

I landed on this lawn in Jasper, Alabama, by means of an internship through the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC). Working with New College at the University of Alabama, and the Walker Area Community Foundation, our specific program, the Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship (JOIP), focuses on civic learning and understanding asset-based approaches when working with communities in Alabama.

Like every community, I have found that each place you wander (and wonder) through paints a different picture, adds to the overall image. The overall image, I have found, is not always cohesive. Here in Walker County, the painters are armed with glue sticks and a dedication to the collage like none other.

One "painter" I met was Tina Aaron. We met on a Tuesday afternoon at the YAP House, a yellow brick building that houses a branch of the Youth Advocate Program. YAP is a national nonprofit that provides support to children, teens and families impacted by adversity or trauma.

Looking through the lens of YAP, the image of Jasper I am met with is constantly conflicted. Families that spend their weekends at the Lake juxtaposed with families that spend their weekly two-hour visits with their children in supervised visitation rooms. How do you bridge that gap? Tina's solution is to plant seeds. By instilling programs and initiatives, programs like YAP show children that there are people out there who care about them. While acts like these may seem trivial to those who are lucky enough to have their basic needs met, they hold great significance to the children YAP serves.

2021 University of Alabama New College JOIP interns at Five Loaves Bakery & Cafe in Jasper: (from left to right) Virginia Saft, Ariel Jones, Katy Hurd, Patrick Dutton and John Pace. Photo by DMC.

One method of outreach Tina uses is "blessing opportunities" posts on Facebook that let the community know about ongoing drives or needs for donations. When the DHR Social Work office was in need of supplies, Tina was able to gather new pajamas, socks and underwear from members of her church. She isn't making demands or guilt tripping fellow social media users, just reminding them that need *does* exist and providing simple ways to help – to acknowledge and maybe reach across that gap.

A large part of growing up, most will learn, is becoming self-aware in ways you don't expect. You learn to speak, to walk, to drive, to open a bottle of wine, to file taxes, the expected stuff. But you also learn that not everyone speaks the same way. Drives the same car. Likes the same wine. Pays the same amount in taxes. You learn that other kids don't have the same food in their lunchbox as you, that some don't have a lunchbox at all.

When met with these realizations, it can be easy to shy away, to avert your eyes from the gap. The problems seem huge, and you feel small. It's easier to not think about it, or it's too overwhelming to think about for too long. Blessing Opportunities give the community both an awareness and a solution, short and sweet and within Facebook's post character limit.

Tina has also been instrumental in implementing trauma-informed education into schools in Walker County. The approach

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Collinsville

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Cricket Theatre

In addition to garnering these skills learned from the average day-to-day, the CHA and the Library, with my assistance, put on an event at the historic Cricket Theatre. I worked on the advertisements, the coordination of the performer, marketing to different towns surrounding Collinsville and in writing a press release for local newspapers. The event, which featured a storyteller, had over 100 attendees and kicked off more performances at the Cricket by different groups. The theatre has been a focus of the CHA and the town for many years, and it was wonderful to see it in use again.

Something unique to the Living Democracy program is the full immersion that students undergo over their 10 weeks. They live in the communities, work in the communities, and write about those they meet. This isn't a program where students suggest ideas from afar, but rather they meet with community members and listen to their suggestions and work alongside them to improve the town. During my time in Collinsville, I was able to see this in myself and others, and it is remarkable how much more work can be accomplished when we simply sit down and listen to someone else, especially those that we see as different from ourselves.

The person that drove into Collinsville in May and the person who drove away in July was not the same person, and I am grateful for those 10 weeks of transformation. I left this experience with a community of people that will always be in my corner and a town that I felt I could advocate for. I met citizens and leaders who cared deeply about their home and wanted others to see the beauty that comes from a two-stoplight town. This wasn't a group of people vastly different from me and my community, but rather a citizenry that wanted to push their beloved town into the future. They wanted improvements, technology, jobs and equality all within their town limits. The people of Collinsville didn't think they had to move away to experience a modern town, but they believed then, and still do, that they can bring their town up to speed with other larger cities without losing their unique charm.

Personally, I left this town with a greater appreciation for their place in our state. Being from a suburb of Huntsville, I hadn't seen the importance of these small towns until I lived it myself. I didn't understand that so much progress and improvements are driven by a small-town librarian or councilmember. I didn't see that titles were somewhat futile and how all it took to improve your town was a determination to do the hard things and get the projects started, even if you were doing it all alone. I also saw myself grow in confidence, in capabilities and in my beliefs. I am now aware that I can complete tasks that I may have doubted myself in before and developed new skills like building a website or cold-calling businesses or conducting an interview. Living Democracy, and Collinsville specifically, gave me the room to try and to fail, and the room to succeed and grow. This program is unique and the opportunities it creates for students can be life changing and encouraging for both students and towns. I know for certain I wouldn't be in the place I am currently without Living Democracy and this program's emphasis on growth and community engagement. ▪

A native of Madison, Alabama, Hannah White participated in the Living Democracy program in the summer of 2019. Since then, she has helped oversee the program as the Graduate Teaching Assistant for the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities at Auburn University. She received her B.A. in Political Science in 2020 and will complete her master's in Public Administration in May 2022, both from Auburn University.

Living Democracy is coordinated by the Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for the Arts and Humanities in the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn University and the David Mathews Center for Civic Life's Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP). The project brings together undergraduate college students and citizens to collaborate on issues of concern to Alabama communities and prepares these students for civic life through living-learning experiences in the summer (see article, page 35). If your community is interested in learning more about the Living Democracy program or possibly hosting a student, contact Dr. Mark Wilson, Director of Community Engagement in the College of Liberal Arts at mwilson@auburn.edu.

Camden: Making Wishes a Reality – Living Democracy in Action

Haley Pascal • Operations Coordinator • David Mathews Center

A pioneering community of the Living Democracy Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP) is Camden, the county seat of Wilcox County. Beginning in May 2021, Auburn University senior Lauren Landers moved 120 miles across the state from Auburn to her new home for the next 10 weeks. Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center, the community partner of the Camden Living Democracy program, acted as the central hub for the summer's activities and gatherings.

"I thought this internship would provide some valuable hands-on experience for me before graduating," said Lauren. "Living Democracy was a unique internship to take on as a Social Work major, and I really believed it could help me develop skills that I couldn't really find in more traditional programs."

Intern Lauren Landers with students from the Westgate community attending weekly mentorship program utilizing the arts program. Photo by DMC

The main focus of Lauren's summer internship was working with City Councilwoman Andrea Finklea to conduct a weekly arts-based mentorship program with a group of young girls from Camden's Westgate neighborhood, a small primarily African-American community nestled just outside downtown Camden. "Outside of vacation bible school with the local churches, there is nothing else for the kids to do during the summer," she said. The girls were brought into Black Belt Treasures and allowed to work with their hands using a variety of materials: paint, clay, markers, yarn and other less traditional supplies. "The girls really wanted to make slime one week," Lauren recalled with a laugh, "so I looked up how to make slime and that was our activity for the day."

Other community members offered their support and time with the mentorship program, as well. Black Belt Treasures Executive Director Sulynn Creswell spoke about the unique opportunity JOIP provided for Camden: "The community benefits from having an outside, youthful, educated perspective of its people, place, history and culture and interactions, or lack of, with citizen groups and/or civic organizations. These benefits include validation – both positive and negative – new ideas for addressing problems, building new relationships and drawing positive attention to the community through articles which then serve as leveraging tools for grant and partnership opportunities."

Betty Anderson, a lifelong resident of Camden and owner and director of the Camden Shoe Shop & Quilt Museum, provided transportation for the girls to and from Black Belt Treasures each week. During one art lesson, Betty helped Lauren craft a painting activity copying patterns from different Gee's Bend quilts onto canvas. During this time, Betty also treated the girls to a unique perspective on the history of the Gee's Bend quilters in Camden as both a daughter and granddaughter of original Gee's Bend quilters.

However, when Lauren began talking with the girls, it was clear there was more work to be done outside of the weekly mentorship. "I asked my students on the first day what they want to be when they grow up, and most of them said professional athletes because it is what they know through their school," she said. "But their local park does not have any equipment for them to play with." To remedy this and better serve the Westgate community, Lauren took matters into her own hands and began finding contacts to support her endeavor.

On June 10, Lauren took to Facebook and posted a fundraiser in conjunction with Black Belt Treasures titled "Outdoor Recreational Equipment for Children in Camden." Along with the post announcing the fundraiser, Lauren said she learned there are many things that children in Wilcox County don't have the opportunity to do or experience because of insufficient resources available in rural Alabama. Since its inception, the fundraiser has raised $2,000 and reached more than 100 people on Facebook alone.

Creswell described her admiration for Lauren's passion throughout her internship: "Lauren's strength is the impact she has on her student mentors and finding a way to leave the community better than when she arrived. She listened to

her mentor group, identified the community needs and took the initiative to locate funds and donations to meet those needs."

In addition to creating the fundraiser, Lauren also personally reached out to universities across the Black Belt region to gauge their interest in supporting Camden's cause. Both Auburn University and Auburn University at Montgomery (AUM) donated sports equipment for the local Westgate Community Park. "I was overwhelmed by the support I received," she said. "Because of the contributions from everyone, I provided recreation equipment for the girls I mentor to use in their community park. I was also able to donate basketballs, footballs and tennis balls to the Camden Community Youth Development Center and BAMA Kids."

Although this task was not listed as a role for her summer internship, Lauren felt she could provide a helping hand to a community that welcomed her so wholeheartedly. "I've been so lucky to be in this community that is so welcoming and believes in making a positive change," she said. "Everyone has been so supportive of my internship. I have learned so much in such a short time by being hands-on and having this immersive experience."

As for her wishes for the Camden community beyond her 10-week internship, Lauren said: "My hope is that I am a small step into a bright future for children in Camden. I see so much talent in each of them, and I am confident that they can achieve their biggest dreams and have the hearts to do so." ■

Haley Pascal is a native of Montgomery and graduate of Auburn University. Previously, she served as Program Assistant for the Alabama Bicentennial Commission's education initiatives, working with K-12 educators across the state while managing the Bicentennial's Summer Institutes. In Fall 2019, she served as an Education Curator at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, where she managed the pilot sessions of the Department's Alabama History Institutes. As Operations Coordinator for the David Mathews Center for Civic Life, Haley is essential to managing partnerships, publications and day-to-day operations.

Jasper continued from page 41

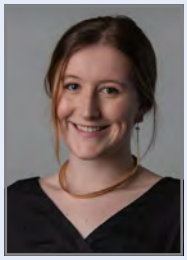
encourages teachers to examine *why* students are behaving poorly rather than immediately disciplining them. New concepts often require convincing, and trauma-informed education was no exception. Aaron remembers pushback from schools. Teachers worried that they already had too much on their plates to learn new techniques. "We believe in discipline," teachers would tell Aaron. And she'd reply, "New doesn't mean more work, it just means different techniques."

Unlike Facebook followers, the schoolteachers Tina works with are already aware of the issues at hand: students who misbehave, and teachers who don't have time to handle it all. "Trauma isn't an excuse," Tina tells me, "it's an explanation." When school faculty are aware of problems their students face at home, they can better help those students with resources that YAP has to offer. Rather than take away recess and PE, teachers can have the tools to respond to their students' behavior with empathy.

Now, instead of attempting to punish behavior, potentially furthering cycles of abuse, teachers can take students to "Calming Camps," another YAP initiative. Filled with sensory toys and mental health activities, Calming Camps provide students with a safe space to decompress within an outdoor-themed environment. "A few years ago, no one was talking about mental health," Tina said. "Now we have six schools in our cohort."

The way Tina describes trauma is important. It frames trauma not as what's wrong with you but what has happened to you. As a consequence, trauma doesn't define these young people. By encouraging her community to plant seeds of hope in others' lives, she is not only reminding those in need that they are cared for, but also reminding those who aren't to care. Like any good painter, she understands perspective is key. She is giving her community the opportunity to repaint the scene in front of them, whether they are able to contribute a brushstroke or an entire scene.

Even now, after several months removed from this experience, I still think about Jasper daily. I've already been back to visit twice. There are a lot of cliches you can write about internship experiences, or small towns that affect the way you think and live, or people who inspired you to continue working and becoming a better person. I'm sure you've heard all these cliches before; I have too. But this *was* my experience. I spent the summer in a town with people who truly care about their community. I met painters like Tina who dedicate all their brushstrokes to painting a better picture for everyone. And I lived with five other interns who care as deeply as I do about actively participating in the places you are staying. ■



Virginia Saft is a senior in the Blount Scholars Program at the University of Alabama. She is studying English and Creative Writing and plans to join Teach for America once she graduates.

Community Foundation Trains Next Generation

Councilwoman Jennifer Williams Smith • City of Jasper

Years ago, as a city employee, I attended a council work session where the discussion involved the need for more youth activities, specifically building a new neighborhood facility. Opinions were given about what the teens needed but neither the neighborhood teens, nor their parents, were ever asked. Later, I was told the needs of teens, by teens, right from my kitchen table. Their list included a workout room with various weights, computer room with WiFi and/or somewhere indoors to play basketball on Sundays and holidays – none of which were discussed at the meeting. I learned an important lesson that day. We all have different views on the most pressing needs in our community as well as our own ideas on how to meet those needs. However, when diverse voices are invited to the table, and are respected for their different viewpoints and unique perspectives, communities flourish as a whole.

Walker Area Community Foundation

The Walker Area Community Foundation (WACF) does this better than any organization I know. A grantmaking organization at heart, the Foundation is focused on proactively finding solutions to our community's greatest needs. Through its leadership and financial investments, the Foundation is building the permanent capital needed in our area to daily facilitate community conversations, inspire action and empower partners. It is focused on training the next generation to have the confidence and ability needed to walk into any room and be effective no matter the location.

The Foundation believes in the importance of bringing resources into our community that create a better quality of life for our residents. Because of this belief, the Foundation partnered with the University of Alabama's New College and the David Mathews Center for Civic Life (DMC) to organize an internship opportunity for college students interested in community engagement and impact. This internship is a part of the DMC's Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP) that trains students in civic engagement and then gives them hands-on experience addressing community concerns. New College, which is best known for helping students build individualized majors, also has a long history of community engagement. In addition to students from New College and other UA programs, students from Auburn University, Stillman College, the University of Montevallo, Troy University, the University of South Alabama, Alabama A&M and Tuskegee University have also participated in the JOIP.

Every summer New College interns live and work in Walker County. Working closely with the Walker Area Community Foundation, UA interns learn first-hand the challenges and benefits of joining their talents and resources with those of community partners. True to the premise that strong, collaborative relationships are crucial to effect social change in communities, students immerse themselves in their surroundings, living, working and socializing in the community as they engage issues identified by local nonprofits and the WACF.

Interns come to Jasper with a variety of skills, passions and reasons for signing up. Whatever the reason, we are grateful for their service to our area and work to help them find a piece of themselves in the process.

Katie Tindol, 2019 intern: *During my time in Jasper, I learned a good bit about myself, as well as the community. I found myself with a newfound appreciation and love for small town living, particularly in the deep south. Having the opportunity to pour into the community through events like the Tallulah half marathon as well as through Community Dinners I learned more about the people that choose to call Jasper home. I began to see how beautifully diverse this*

community truly is, and I was touched by those who were genuinely curious about me and my role as an intern in Walker County over the summer.

The Foundation has matched more than 50+ interns with nonprofit organizations that tie to their majors and career pursuits. It's important to the Foundation to get it right, to offer each student an internship that will prove to be a defining moment in their lives.

Rolanda Turner, 2019 intern: *I honestly didn't know what the staff had in mind when it came down to choosing a location that I could both flourish and be challenged in this summer. However, I do recall preaching to the Foundation how important education inequality was to me. I don't know if they were moved by the tone of my voice or simply inspired by my passion for change – whatever it was, it was simply life-changing. I'm a week into my internship and I can assure you all that I was placed at the most unprecedented organization, Walker College Foundation, with a real-life Lois Lane, Mrs. Holly Trawick.*

Community Impact

Internship placements have created projects that impact our community in a variety of ways. From working on downtown revitalization through Jasper Main Street, to tackling healthcare with the Walker County Health Action Partnership, to creating potential legislation for Trauma-Informed Care, interns are pivotal in our path to success.

I have the opportunity to meet many of the interns throughout the summer as they participate in "Community Dinners", informal meals hosted at homes or restaurants designed to introduce interns to local people they may not otherwise get the chance to meet. Interns learn about the dynamics of Walker County while in the homes or offices of key leaders.

Community Dinners are great for the students, but they also provide an opportunity for me to engage with them. In these laid back settings through informal conversations, interns feel comfortable sharing their true thoughts about Jasper and our surrounding communities. Many comment that their experience is not the Walker County they thought they were moving to from their Google searches. What they find is a kindness they cannot explain; a hip downtown with breweries; a beautiful lake within miles of downtown; and their favorite – Aldi.

Brittany Grady, 2017 intern: *Jasper is a new place to me and has much to offer. Between the downtown restaurants, friendly faces, and lake prospects, I am excited to experience all that Jasper has to offer*.

It's easy to think that eight weeks is not long enough to really learn a community, but the interns constantly show us that they do. They get it. At the end of those two months, they report back to the community what they have accomplished while here, giving us fresh, new eyes into our community's greatest opportunities through the lens of their passions and skills.

Together, the City of Jasper and its partners are steadily turning our vision of a vibrant future for Walker County into reality. Through the development and construction of a sports complex; renovation of a historic building; paving and infrastructure; industrial and economic recruitment; and the upgrading of existing recreational parks, the great work in progress by the City of Jasper has created and is sustaining a shared excitement and optimism about this time in the life of our community. And this resonates with our younger generations – the young people who live here as well as the ones who only stay for a few weeks but leave having had an exceptional experience in a place they may have never visited otherwise. ■

Councilwoman Jennifer Williams Smith is a Jasper native, a graduate of Walker High School and attended Auburn University receiving her bachelor's degree in Communications. She was elected to the Jasper City Council in 2012 and is now serving her third term. Smith is the owner and marketing consultant for Just Face It Alabama and teaches adaptive dance throughout Walker County Schools. In addition to serving the community as a city councilmember, Jennifer volunteers and serves on several advisory boards for organizations throughout the area. She is a past Chair of the Alabama League of Municipalities' Human Development standing committee and the current Vice Chair for the Finance, Administration and Intergovernmental Relations committee. She is also active with Women in Municipal Government (WIMG), a constituency group of the National League of Cities.

Becoming Civic Heroes: Troy University and Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program

Haley Pascal • Operations Coordinator • David Mathews Center

One of the newest university partners of the David Mathews Center Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP), Troy University, has faced many successes and challenges since joining the program in 2018. Led by faculty mentors Dr. Jonathan Cellon, Associate Dean of the Center for Student Success, and Lauren Cochran, Coordinator of Civic Engagement, the Troy University JOIP team has developed many engaging programs with a skilled group of interns over the past three years. Their two-pronged internship seeks to connect college-level interns with elementary and middle school students to educate on important aspects of active citizenship.

The first facet of the internship focuses on a discussion-based mentorship program between Troy University and Charles Henderson Middle School. Titled "Real Talk on Race", this discussion series pursues understanding and connectivity around the topic of race and diversity. As the first JOIP intern at Troy, Monroeville native Kourtney Frye took the development of the program head-on and established not only the model for the discussions, but also the supporting network of student volunteers to help facilitate each session.

Middle school students met in small groups at the end of the day to learn from their mentors and each other about race, biases and diversity. These discussions promote active listening amongst young people, thereby increasing empathy, listening and learning from one another. The Real Talk on Race Mentorship Program champions diversity in all aspects to help create a more inclusive and understanding environment for students.

Since the first semester, Real Talk continues to be an active component of the Troy JOIP program. "While we are pleased with our program's success over the past two years, we know there is still work to do in our community," asserts faculty mentor Lauren Cochran. "In Troy, as well as nationally, we seem to take a step forward, then a step back with issues involving race relations. While there have been many who have embraced caring for their neighbors and community spirit, others have retreated to stringent ideals, and shared understanding is lost. In response, this project seeks to build community capital through immersive civic learning around the issue of race and citizenship."

Due to the lack of in-person programming in 2020 and 2021, Real Talk on Race moved from the local middle school to the outdoor amphitheater on Troy's campus. Renamed Coffee and Conversations, the JOIPs provided coffee and a welcoming environment for college students to have open and honest conversations about race. Psychology major Chauntina Whittle put her skills to use by creating a questionnaire to gauge the knowledge of each participant in hopes to better guide the conversations. "We ran into an issue by subconsciously assuming these college students would already have a baseline understanding of racial issues and institutional biases," said Lauren. However, in the upcoming academic year, Lauren and Jonathan are looking for ways to further develop the Real Talk program to include an educational component for Troy's college population alongside the middle school students.

Troy Mayor Jason Reeves and Troy JOIP faculty mentor Lauren Cochran conducting a Q&A with the students at Troy's Civic Heroes Camp, July 2021. Photo by DMC.

"We want to fill this need for diversity and racial justice by addressing concerns and coming to a collective understanding," added faculty mentor Joanthan Cellon. "Too many times forums with open mics are unhelpful to the community as people

retreat into personal camps and are unwilling to concede, much less find any common ground to stand on." By utilizing a deliberative discussion format, the Troy JOIP hopes their community can move forward together and that each citizen can be an active participant in this process.

For the second year of their JOIP programming, Jonathan and Lauren aspired to create a new aspect of their internship: a civic-based educational summer camp for elementary students in partnership with the Pike County Boys and Girls Club.

During the 2020 Spring semester, three interns set to work building the camp from the ground up: Millbrook native and Exercise Science major Nicole Jackson, Luverne native and Psychology major Chauntina Whittle, and returning intern Kourtney Frye, now working as a graduate student pursuing a master's in Social Sciences with a concentration in History. Everything was coming together for a fun, informative, and successful multi-tiered internship program until the COVID-19 pandemic halted all in-person programming for the immediate future.

In the wake of university lockdowns in the Spring semester, Troy JOIPs were faced with a conundrum: how to conduct a civic-based summer camp for elementary students in a non-physical space. Lauren recalled gathering her interns together to think about restructuring the camp online, calling the idea of running an online summer camp "daunting;" Nicole expressed her concern of parents and students suffering from "digital learning weariness" and wanting to take a break for the summer. Despite these concerns, the JOIP team decided to forge ahead with the program and provide an immersive civic education experience for any participating students, no matter how few would participate.

The response was beyond anyone's expectations. In total, 80 students participated in the camp from 11 states; more than 50 students were from Alabama, and the remaining campers logged on from all across the nation, some even as far as California. Because the students were spread across four time zones, the camp was divided into two time slots per day, one at 10:00 a.m. central time and again at 1:30 p.m. Over the course of three weeks, there were six unique sessions where students met with their camp counselors, Nicole and Chauntina, to receive a lesson in embodying the characteristics of a good citizen – such as courage, integrity and honesty – followed by a lesson in government or history.

"History is important to teach and learn, but these good citizen characteristics can be implemented and used right now, and the students can take these with them as they grow and tie them back into their regular school lessons," said Nicole.

As restrictions slightly lifted in the summer of 2021, the Civic Heroes Camp conducted both an online camp similar to the previous year's structure, and a socially-distanced mask-enforced in-person camp for elementary students at the Boys and Girls Club meeting space. Incoming intern Spencer Harvey facilitated the in-person camp, where several community heroes such as nurses, engineers, and police officers educated the campers on their roles and responsibilities to the City of Troy.

One special member of the community heroes segment was Troy Mayor Jason Reeves, who held a question-and-answer session with the campers about the daily duties of a mayor. After answering a variety of questions, including "Why is the school day so long?" and "How were you elected as mayor?", Mayor Reeves spoke on the importance of being an active citizen even at an early age: "Don't let anybody tell you because you're young your thoughts and ideas aren't important. We need young people that are engaged and involved in Troy as community helpers. What you say and think matters to everyone, especially me as the leader of the city."

Mayor Reeves went on to share his personal dream for the city of Troy with the campers: "My dream is for all of you to stay here in Troy, maybe go to Troy University and have an excellent quality of life as you grow in your roles as a member of this community and give back to this wonderful city."

As Troy University continues to be a cherished partner of the Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program, faculty mentors share why they believe in the program and are proud to be an integral part. "This opportunity is so transformative for students," said Lauren Cochran. "It allows them a lot of freedom to bring their own creative ideas and perspectives into their work. I think it also added so much value to work within the community, and the resources available to both students and faculty are unlike anything else."

Dr. Jonathan Cellon proclaimed: "As part of a generation that was raised to essentially check boxes on service hours and volunteer tasks, this program moves past all that. It is not a transactional model, it is a sense of diligence or duty for both these young citizens and their community."

"The JOIP program also adds value to the community because it starts programming that otherwise wouldn't take place," affirmed Lauren. "Students have the opportunity to become civic heroes themselves and make an impact outside the classroom and into the local community, and that is something that is needed everywhere." ▪

Editor's note: See p. 44 for Haley Pascal's bio.

Community Immersion through History: The University of South Alabama's Delta Fellows Internship

Haley Pascal • Operations Coordinator • David Mathews Center

The University of South Alabama joined the Jean O'Connor-Snyder Internship Program (JOIP) for the first time in 2019. Faculty mentors Dr. Kathy Cooke, Dean of the Honors College and Shannon Shelley-Tremblay, J.D., Director of the Office of Community Engagement, collaborated to form an oral history project that told the unique history of the Blakeley Bluff region of Mobile, funded by a grant from the Alabama Humanities Alliance. During the summer of 2019, nearly 20 oral histories were conducted in the designated region, encapsulating a wide array of residents – from the deep rooted to the visitors.

The Delta Fellows internship began with a series of brown bag sessions with faculty mentors and interested students in the 2019 fall semester. These sessions helped build context around the program to better immerse the students who would enter the internship. In the following semester, four JOIP interns were selected and enrolled in a course led by the faculty mentors to facilitate the oral history project. The first classes focused on defining civic engagement and community involvement, then turned to historical research for the Blakeley Bluff region.

Unfortunately, the implementation of the project was interrupted by the complete lockdown of all Alabama university activity in light of the coronavirus pandemic. Luckily, the students were able to continue their projects in an alternative method. "We utilized technology as early as possible," said Kathy. JOIP interns checked in with their faculty mentors via Zoom; wrote research papers individually rather than in groups; and participated in socially distant journalism when possible. "We were all beginners together."

Due to the foundational work from the previous summer, community members were accessible and more than willing to contribute to the program. Students were able to fulfill their respective tasks with minimal friction, and even organized an online community dialogue about the Delta and Blakeley via Zoom, complete with a student-created discussion guide.

For the second year of the Delta Fellows program, two additional historic projects were implemented alongside the Blakeley Bluff Project: the Mobile Jewish Oral History Project and the Mobile County Remembrance Project.

As part of an ongoing community-based archives project supported by the Alabama Humanities Alliance, the Jewish Mobile Oral History Project produced a body of narrative interviews from members of Mobile's Jewish community. Already more than 20 interviews with Jewish residents have been conducted, transcribed and archived; these interviews speak on

the history, development and present day experience of this religious minority in Alabama. The Delta Fellow assigned to this project worked directly with the McCall Library to process the interviews and assisted with creating interpretive context for the accompanying website; throughout the semester she also participated in a number of community events including a Yom Hashoah observance (Holocaust Remembrance Day) and a Mobile Jewish Film Festival presentation.

The Mobile County Remembrance Project was established as part of the Equal Justice Initiative's National Memorial for Peace and Justice aimed at uncovering the truth and moving the United States closer to a time of racial reconciliation. Delta Fellow Tory Sanders assisted the Mobile County Remembrance Committee by participating in the soil collection ceremony; leading a workshop for students involved with a high school local history essay contest; and producing a comprehensive report on all aspects of the Committee's events and programs. Tory's report served as a factor in obtaining historical markers and interpretive data for Mobile's permanent memorial space for victims of lynching during the period of racial terror between 1865 and 1950.

USA's faculty mentors hope to continue to grow the Delta Fellows Program into the future and make a lasting connection with both their community's history and people. Through this internship, interns and faculty alike remain committed to uplifting and preserving the unique local history of Mobile. As for the University's role in the Mobile community, faculty mentor Kathy Cooke said: "Community engagement is not as simple as just showing up, but there is a lot of power in showing up, being engaged, being proximate and being connected with the people in your community. We showed up for each other, for our students and for our community partners, as well. This experience emphasized the power of open listening and engaging – and showing up even when it is hard."■ *Editor's note: See p. 44 for Haley Pascal's bio.*

ELBA: Not Simply a Shared Space Where People Live

Oquendo Bernard is a junior at Auburn University pursuing a double major in International Studies and Spanish. He is an international student athlete from Jamaica who competes in 110m hurdles on Auburn's track team. As the first international student in Living Democracy and JOIP history, he provided a unique perspective while conducting a "domestic study abroad" internship this summer in Elba, Coffee County. "This experience has helped me to understand what a true community is," he said. "It is not simply a shared space where people live. Instead, it is the art and practice of being our most loving, open, and authentic selves while we honor others doing the same. It is also a place that has values and promotes open and participative development across different generations to continue that unique legacy. Elba is a true community. It amazes me how connected citizens are in this location, and one can sense the genuineness in their encounters. Everyone knows everyone and, no matter where they go, Elba is always home."

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