

Spring 2025 Volume 82, Issue 4

# The Alabama MUNICIPAL Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities

## Record Attendance at the League's Spring Events!





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The Alabama League of Municipalities is a nonpartisan membership association of over 450 incorporated cities and towns. Since 1935, the League has worked to strengthen municipal government through advocacy, training and the advancement of effective local leadership. As the recognized voice of Alabama's cities and towns, ALM's member municipalities benefit from a variety of member programs, services and activities that are impossible to accomplish alone.



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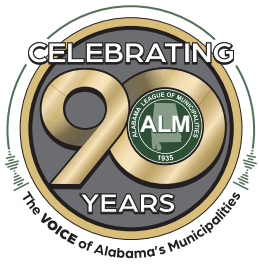


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## On the Cover:

*Since 1935, the Alabama League of Municipalities has focused its efforts on supporting our members by listening to their needs, advocating for them and delivering resources to help them lead effectively. As we celebrate our 90th year, we are thrilled to see our event attendance numbers reach new levels, and we plan to continue building on that momentum.*





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# Message from the Editor

Lori Jhons • Communications Director

**A**s we approach our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary in May, we are reminded of our core mission here at the League – to strengthen municipal government through advocacy, training and the advancement of effective local leadership. It is in this vein that we launched the quality-of-life campaign, **Live Locally Alabama!**

Our goal for this initiative is to encourage civic engagement, instill community pride and highlight the crucial role municipal government plays in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens. We made it a priority to create ready-to-use resources like press releases, talking points, graphics, videos and flyers to assist every municipality in telling their communities' stories better. We have made it easy for our members and citizens to just download the items from our website to share them. **Scan the first QR code to learn more.** Ultimately, I just want to remind our municipal leaders that the most important part about the campaign is communicating to your citizens and legislators about the things you go through every day to make your communities better places to live, work, play and prosper.

Since launching the campaign in September, ALM leadership and staff have promoted it at every ALM event; conducted several news interviews; published multiple articles on various platforms; and aired commercials on Alabama Public Television and a couple of radio stations. **Scan the QR codes to the left** to watch one of the commercials and to view the WVAS radio interview featuring Greg Cochran and Mayor Tony Haygood's discussion about the campaign and some of our legislative priorities.

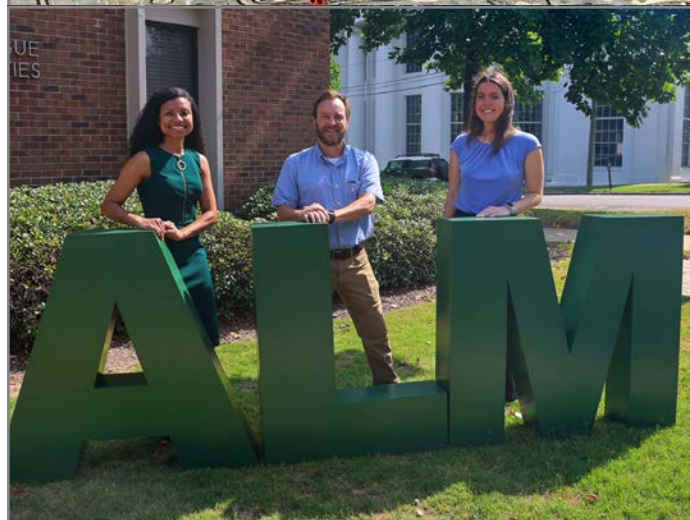
Additionally, I have had numerous speaking engagements ranging from youth and adult leadership groups to sharing updates at the Southern Municipal Leadership Conference. I have also had conversations with officials and students from our four-year universities and community colleges on opportunities for internships and community projects to support the campaign. I am hoping those efforts will pull together soon, and I always welcome ideas.

Furthermore, I want to encourage our members and the public to celebrate **Municipal Government Week during May 11-17**. Get creative with ways to participate, such as using the LLA campaign assets, and be sure to tag our social media pages!

Lastly, I want to specifically recognize Karl Franklin, our graphic designer, and Caroline Carter, our communications intern since the summer, for doing such an awesome job with creating assets for this campaign, our 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary and so much more this year! We wish Caroline the best of luck in her next endeavors upon graduating from The University of Alabama this May.

Please reach out to me if I can ever be helpful to you at [ljhons@almonline.org](mailto:ljhons@almonline.org). ■

Sincerely,  
Lori Davis Jhons



Live Locally  
Alabama Webpage



Live Locally  
Alabama Commercial



WVAS  
Interview



# LONG-STANDING POULTRY PARTNERSHIP WITH ACCS STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES



*One* of the state's largest poultry producers continues to expand its partnership with the Alabama Community College System. The Pilgrim's Better Futures program provides tuition assistance for Pilgrim's Pride Corporation employees and their dependents at Northwest Shoals Community College, Snead Community College, and Enterprise Community College, offering education that opens doors to life-changing careers.

In Franklin County, Pilgrim's leaders are working with Northwest Shoals to help employees and their families get the training they need for better-paying, more stable jobs.

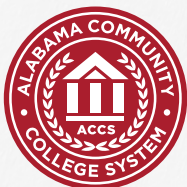
"The Better Future program provides Pilgrim's workers and their dependents the opportunity to boost their expertise and encourages local talent to stay within our region," said Dr. Crystal Reed, Dean of Students at Northwest Shoals. "Since the inception of the program, the college has helped approximately 22 Pilgrim's employees or dependents enroll in classes here at Northwest Shoals. We visit the plant to share this opportunity and offer support programs to our students on a regular basis."

This partnership is more than just an educational initiative, it is an investment into Alabama communities. The Alabama Community College System is strengthening the state's growing industries by partnering with Pilgrim's to secure higher education without the financial burden of tuition costs.

Whitten McGee will be the first in his family to finish college when he earns his degree. His father, Patrick, has worked at Pilgrim's for the past 15 years.

"I'm incredibly grateful to be a scholarship recipient of the program," said Whitten. "This opportunity has allowed me to pursue my dreams without the burden of debt. When an employer invests in scholarships for their employees' families, it's more than just financial help – it shows they truly care about our futures and want to see us succeed."

As the ACCS continues to expand opportunities through partnerships like this, the Pilgrim's Better Futures Program stands as a shining example of how education and workforce development go hand in hand. With strong support from Alabama's community colleges, this partnership is creating brighter futures for students, families, and communities across our state.



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# Executive Director's Second Quarter Report

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

Spring in Alabama is one of my favorite times of the year. It is the renewal of warmer weather, longer days of sunlight, greenery and flowers blooming, and preparation for the ALM Annual Convention. The ALM staff is finalizing the events for our upcoming convention on May 13 – 16 in Huntsville. They have built a great lineup of keynote speakers to share topics on leadership and strategies for building vibrant communities.

As the legislative session draws to a close, the ALM advocacy team continues to work diligently with members of the House and Senate to influence legislative proposals being debated. We hope everyone is engaging with them and reading the weekly *State House Advocate* to stay abreast of the latest developments. This is sent by email to our membership on Fridays during the legislative session. If you are not receiving this email, please email Lori Jhons, ALM communications director, at [ljhons@almonline.org](mailto:ljhons@almonline.org).

We continue to make great strides with our two newest programs, the Economic Development Academy (EDA) and Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE). Mary Jackson Pollard, Bryan Parker and Neal Wade are guiding community leaders through the best practices of recruitment and retention of economic investment. The EDA has assisted more than 45 municipalities to align their local assets with opportunities to embrace new and expanded businesses in their community.

The ACE program has continued to flourish with Mary's leadership in providing strategic plans and coordination of partnerships to encourage and promote intentional growth within our smaller communities. This program brings community leaders together to visualize how a community can best prioritize their potential opportunities to grow and prosper. During the upcoming convention, we will host a luncheon for our EDA and ACE community leaders with a keynote speaker.

The ALM communications team has continued to develop our messaging with expanded platforms, utilizing social media, traditional media and our website. Our Live Locally Alabama campaign is sharing the wonderful work of our communities across Alabama. This campaign is important to amplify as we remind our citizens of how your leadership brings quality of life services and attracts economic investment into their lives. If you are interested in learning more, visit [www.almonline.org](http://www.almonline.org).

The ALM legal team is working with municipal clerks to ensure municipal elections run as smoothly as possible. With more than 450 municipalities holding their local elections this year, it is a daunting task to stay ahead of for the legal team.

The other big project we have been working on this spring is the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program. As you are aware by now, the Alabama Legislature adopted our proposal to create mandatory training for all municipal officials to complete, starting in 2025. This training will provide our officials with the latest in finance, ethics, roles of the mayor and council and best practices in governance. We have partnered with the Alabama Community College System to host our online training on their platform. This allows our members to access the core training material 24/7 if they are unable to attend our in-person training courses throughout the year.

As you see, the ALM team is working hard on providing our municipal officials with intentional resources and tools which will allow them to bring about sustainable growth and prosperity to their respective community. We appreciate your engagement, leadership and commitment to our organization. ■



Peace be with you,  
Gregory D. Cochran, CAE  
Executive Director



Live Locally  
Alabama Materials



2025 Elections  
Manual

# Leadership Perspective

Mayor Mark Saliba • Dothan • ALM President



I know we just came off March Madness and here I am about to quote Nick Saban! What I love about his philosophy is that Saban does not focus on outcomes, as much as he focuses on competing and “being all that you can be;” that is why he gives himself and his players 24 hours before they must get back to the grind. “Move on,” he says, “because there’s another challenge. Usually, a target by those who want to beat you.”

However, at ALM we have had plenty to celebrate, and I give us permission to celebrate a little longer!

Let us celebrate 30 years of ALM’s Certified Municipal Official program, the second oldest program in the country for offering training to all elected officials and municipal employees. After passing the Alabama Municipal Official Training Act in 2024 and it becoming mandatory for all elected officials on Jan. 1, 2025, it solidifies ALM as the leader in training in the state of Alabama!

How about we celebrate our leadership in the League both in the past and the present? Even though we mourn the loss of Ken Smith, the fourth executive director of ALM, it was under his leadership that in those nine years as director, the League garnered 454 of the 463 towns and cities as members! Let us also celebrate the past presidents and especially those that continue to serve in some capacity with the League.

Finally, let us celebrate and throw a party in Huntsville this May 13-16, for our 90<sup>th</sup> birthday! With serving 90 years as “The Voice of Alabama’s Cities and Towns,” ALM is a venerable one-stop shop for a municipal government’s training and resources; legal support; and local, state and federal advocacy. Just think of all those resources that are available to you - you cannot afford not to be a member!

Nevertheless, I want to close the article on celebrating you, the individual that makes up the ALM. Another Saban quote says, “Everybody says that there’s no “I” in team, but there is an “I” in win, because the individuals make the team what it is, and how they think and what they do is important to the team. So, when you act like the individual is not important, well, it is [extremely] important who these people are and what they are.”

You are important to the League, and I want you to come and celebrate with the team in Huntsville in May.

See you there! ■





# Leadership Perspective

Mayor Sherry Sullivan • Fairhope • ALM Vice President



Spring is such a beautiful time of the year in Alabama. It is the season of new beginnings, hope and optimism after the winter. I am sure like Fairhope, there are plenty of ball games and outdoor events in your city or town along with the anticipation of summer. Outdoor events are a wonderful way to get out and connect with the community. There are plenty of opportunities to play, eat and celebrate locally!

As we press forward in April, the legislative session is starting to wind down. It has been a full-time job keeping up with bills this year. The Alabama Legislature has dropped more than 600 bills and many of them impact the work we do at the local level. I am so thankful for Greg, Kayla, Baker, Kaleb and Adam, along with the rest of the League staff, for fighting on our behalf every day. If you are not keeping up with the Friday ALM *State House Advocate*, you really need to make that a priority. As Baker stated at our update in Washington, D.C., it makes a difference when a mayor or councilmember calls their legislator. **YOU CAN HAVE INFLUENCE** by making a phone call or texting your representative.

I look forward to seeing all of you in May at the annual convention in Huntsville! If you see Mayor Mark Saliba before then or at the convention, be sure to thank him for a wonderful year. He has done a fantastic job being the face and the voice of the 465 municipalities throughout the state of Alabama.

See you in Huntsville! ■





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## What Every Potential Candidate Should Know About Municipal Government

**O**n August 26, 2025, most Alabama municipalities will hold elections for the mayor and council. While candidates cannot officially qualify to be on the ballot until June 10, 2025, many candidates have already announced their intention to run for municipal office and have started their campaigns. The Alabama League of Municipalities has prepared a manual titled *Procedures for Holding Elections in Mayor-Council Municipalities*, which covers issues related to campaigning and holding a municipal election. Included in the manual is an elections calendar outlining all of the important dates relating to the election process. This manual is available for download on the League's website; you can scan the QR code to access it.



The goal of this article is to inform potential candidates as to the structure of municipal governments in Alabama as well as to the limitations and restrictions on municipal power. It is not intended as a guide for qualifying and running for municipal office. Candidates must understand the extent of the authority a municipality may exercise before making the decision to run for office. Also, an understanding of these laws and functions can help candidates avoid future embarrassment upon discovering that a campaign promise cannot legally be fulfilled.

The provisions discussed in this article apply generally to any municipality with a mayor/council form of government. Many state laws, however, apply to only certain municipalities. It is up to the candidate to be sure that the rules and regulations set out in this article govern their municipality.

### What is a Municipality?

Historians disagree regarding the reasons municipalities first came into existence. Some reasons include the promotion of commerce, protection from invading armies, convenience or even just the desire of humans to share time with

each other. Regardless of the historical reasons, municipalities today provide many services to their citizens, such as fire and police, utility services, parks and recreation, and historical preservation among others. They also help protect their citizens through these services. Municipalities provide an element of convenience by performing many services which individuals themselves may not be willing to perform, such as construction and maintenance of roads, disposal of garbage and promotion of the arts.

Municipal government provides a means for citizens to have a direct say in which services are needed and how those services should be provided through the process of electing representatives. Representatives, who are chosen from the pool of willing citizens, meet and discuss how the municipality can best meet the needs and desires of their citizens.

When these elected officials meet, however, it is important for all parties to understand that in Alabama, all municipal powers flow directly from the Alabama Legislature. That is to say, Alabama's municipalities do not have "Home Rule" and therefore do not have inherent power to operate as a government independent of the Alabama Legislature. Alabama operates under what is known as the "Dillon Rule." This rule provides that municipalities have no powers beyond those that are given to them by the state Legislature. The authorization must be either explicit or clearly implied from the language of a state statute or constitutional provision. See generally *Mobile v. Moog*, 53 Ala. 561 (Ala. 1875); *Best v. Birmingham*, 79 So. 113 (Ala. 1918).

Briefly, Alabama is governed by the Alabama Constitution of 2022, and any amendments thereto.

Laws in the state constitution are passed by the Legislature, but only become effective following a vote of the public. The constitution provides a framework for the adoption of laws by the Legislature.

Legislative acts cannot conflict with constitutional provisions. If there is a conflict, a new constitutional amendment must be adopted and approved by a vote of the people.

In addition to the constitution, the



Legislature meets at least annually--more often if special sessions are needed--to pass general and local laws. Many of these laws apply directly to the operation of municipal governments. Actions taken by a municipal government cannot conflict with state legislation. Beyond that rule, however, is a further limitation on municipal powers. Not only do municipal actions have to comply with these statutes and the Alabama Constitution, under the Dillon Rule, there must be legislative authority for the municipality to take the specific action in question.

If newly elected municipal officials want to take action, they will need to examine the laws to ensure that the municipality has the power to act in the way desired. If not, authority must be obtained through the Alabama Legislature. Depending on what the official wants to do, this may require either a local act, a general act or possibly even the adoption of a constitutional amendment.

### **The Extent of Municipal Power**

Municipalities are divided into cities and towns on the basis of population. Section 11-40-6, Code of Ala. 1975. If the municipality has less than 2,000 citizens, it is a town. Once the population reaches 2,000, however, the municipality is defined as a city.

Municipalities may exercise two types of power: legislative and corporate. Legislative powers affect the public generally. In exercising these powers, the municipality acts very much as an arm of the state. Corporate powers are more comparable to those of a private corporation and are exercised to benefit the municipality in its proprietary capacity.

### **Appropriations**

Frequently, potential candidates for municipal office make promises to voters that will require some type of appropriation from the municipal treasury. The use of public funds is, of course, of central concern to the voters. Many taxpayers, understandably, want to have a direct say in how their tax money is spent. However, citizens must understand that municipal expenditures are limited by state law.

Perhaps the most common barrier to municipal spending is Section 94 of the Alabama Constitution of 2022. This section is commonly referred to simply as Section 94. It prohibits municipalities from giving anything of value to any private individual or group of individuals. The prohibition also bars donations to private and nonprofit corporations, even if these organizations benefit the public. Section 94 is the reason municipalities cannot pave driveways or parking lots on private property. The rule is also why government property cannot be given away, unless the use of those funds serves a recognized public purpose.

Section 94 is a frequent source of friction for elected officials, especially for those who are new to the operations of public entities. This is because often the groups requesting financial help from the municipality do provide a valid

community service, and there is an inherent desire to assist them. Many are charitable organizations. For the purposes of Section 94, though, it is crucial to distinguish between the public and private nature of the group, and many traditional entities are considered private, not public. Under Section 94, it does not matter that the group is nonprofit. If it is private (which generally means that it was not directly created by a public organization), the municipality may not donate funds to it without finding a public purpose behind the donation.

Section 94, though, does not prohibit municipalities from contracting with private companies and individuals for services. For example, although a municipality cannot give money to the Girl Scouts of America, the municipality may compensate the Girl Scouts for legitimate services they can perform for the municipality. Bear in mind that the service being performed generally must be a service that the municipality could not perform itself.

Similarly, Section 94 does not ban appropriations to public organizations which serve the municipality. For instance, municipalities may contribute funds to public schools their citizens attend. Municipalities may not, however, make donations to band booster clubs or other private clubs organized by students or parents because these are private groups.

Section 94.01 of the Alabama Constitution of 2022, creates a limited exception to Section 94 for economic development projects. The procedures in Section 94.01 must be followed exactly in order to spend public funds under to this provision.

Municipalities must also comply with state bid laws. Generally speaking, the bid law prohibits expenditures of more than \$30,000 (\$100,000 for public works contracts) without first soliciting competitive bids. See Article 3 of Chapter 16 of Title 50, Code of Ala. 1975 (Competitive Bid Law) and Chapter 2 of Title 39, Code of Ala. 1975 (Public Works Bid Law). Municipalities may, however, contract with other public agencies or purchase items through a state contract without first obtaining bids. AGO 2008-093. In addition, they may make purchases through a purchasing cooperative under certain conditions or off an existing Government Services Administration (GSA) contract. Section 41-16-51(a)(17).

There are other provisions governing municipal expenditures that are too numerous to discuss here. What is important is for potential candidates to understand that they must examine expenditures carefully to ensure that the expenditures are legal.

### **The Division of Duties Between Elected Officials**

One of the most misunderstood aspects of municipal government is the separation of duties between the mayor and the council. Like government on the state and federal levels, municipal government is divided into three separate but equal branches: executive, legislative and judicial. Each of these branches has distinct duties, powers and restrictions on how far it can intrude into the affairs of the other branches.



At the municipal level, the mayor serves as the head of the executive branch. Section 11-43-81, Code of Alabama 1975. As such, the mayor is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the municipality. He or she oversees municipal employees, makes sure that bills are paid on time, executes municipal contracts and, in general, performs many of the same functions as a CEO of a private corporation.

In municipalities of less than 12,000 inhabitants, the mayor also presides over council meetings and serves as a member of the council. Section 11-43-40, Code of Alabama 1975. In these cities and towns, the mayor may vote on any issue before the council, introduce measures and participate in debates to the same extent as members of the council.

In cities with populations of more than 12,000, the mayor is not a member of the council. However, he or she has a veto over any permanent action taken by the council. The council can override the veto by a two-third votes. Section 11-43-40, Code of Alabama 1975.

The council is the legislative branch. The council has authority over the finances and property of the municipality. The council establishes policies; passes ordinances; sets tax levels; determines what sorts of services the municipality will offer; and has authority over all other legislative aspects of municipal government. Candidates must understand that individual councilmembers, acting alone, have no greater power or authority than any other citizen of the municipality. The council can only act as a body at a legally convened meeting.

### **Council Meetings & Public Participation**

Problems frequently arise over public participation in council meetings. This is probably due to the misconception of a council meeting as a public hearing. It is not. A council meeting is intended as a gathering of elected officials brought together to conduct the affairs of the municipality. It is a business meeting. The meeting is open to the public not so much to obtain citizen input but to allow the public to observe the affairs of government to ensure appropriate and legal representation by their elected officials. Although most councils do set aside a time for public comment, Alabama law does not guarantee citizens the right to speak at a council meeting. The Open Meetings Act, found in Chapter 25A of Title 36, Code of Alabama 1975, grants citizens the right to be present at public meetings, but it does not grant them an absolute right to express their views at the meeting. Furthermore, the municipality may establish reasonable guidelines governing public participation in the meeting. AGO 98-00134.

### **Public Records**

Potential candidates must also be aware that problems often arise over public records. Controversies over what is public and what is not public are common. It is probably best

to assume as a starting point that all records a municipality keeps are public. Section 36-12-40 and 36-12-41, Code of Alabama 1975, guarantee every citizen the right to inspect and make copies of all public writings, unless otherwise expressly provided by statute. While most records maintained by a municipality are public, some are not available for public inspection even by elected officials. For example, sensitive tax information is protected by state law, and employee withholding information cannot be released. Municipalities are encouraged to establish reasonable procedures governing access to public records. Citizens who wish to view public records must follow these procedures. The custodian of records may ask for a reason for viewing the records and must be convinced that the reason is legitimate. Also, the municipality may charge for making copies. AGO 2008-073.

Additionally, not all records are public. Some records, such as ongoing police investigation files, some material in personnel records, confidential tax information and similar records containing information not for public consumption, are not open to the public.

For potential candidates, it is important to note that individual councilmembers and the mayor generally have no greater right to inspect municipal records than do any other members of the public. See AGO 2000-053.

### **Conclusion**

This article does not answer every conceivable question regarding municipal government, nor could it. Municipal government is multifaceted. It is difficult to even list all the functions performed by municipalities and even harder to explain the laws which govern their operation. Multi-volume sets of books have been written which provide only a brief overview.

What is often overlooked, however, is the community nature of a municipality. Although municipal governments are legally recognized entities with a certain amount of control over the affairs of their citizens, municipalities are still communities. They are organized by citizens who feel a need for the services and protection the government provides. In order to make the government effective, elected officials, and the citizens they represent, must work together in a spirit of cooperation, cooperation based on an understanding of what the municipality is permitted to do under state law. The League hopes this article will help foster this spirit of cooperation. ■

The League encourages municipal clerks to make copies of this article to make potential candidates aware of the regulations that will govern their actions as municipal officials. This article should also serve as a refresher for elected officials who are presently in office.



# EDA Spotlight: Irondale Charts Future Growth with Economic Development Blueprint

Caroline Carter • Communications Intern • ALM

**L**ocated just east of Birmingham in Jefferson County, Irondale is a city built on industry, strengthened by community and shaped by change. First incorporated in 1887, the community began as a modest railroad and mining town anchored by the Cahaba Iron Works, later known as the Irondale Furnace. From its early days of pig iron production

to its role in Alabama's rail economy, Irondale's story is steeped in Alabama's history. With a current population of more than 3,000, the city is writing a new chapter focused on intentional growth, strategic planning and honoring its uniqueness.

As Irondale continues to grow, city leaders are focusing on the future, one that keeps pace with development while protecting the city's character. That goal led Irondale to participate in the Alabama League of Municipalities' Economic Development Academy (EDA), a program launched in 2021 to help local officials better understand the tools and processes behind long-term economic growth.

Developed in partnership with the Alabama Community College System, the academy provides training, peer engagement and guidance from economic development experts. Participants work as a team, attend in-person sessions and complete a community-focused capstone project.

Irondale participated in the program in 2022, and their team included Mayor James Stewart Jr., Councilman Aaron Sims, Councilwoman Cindy Cuellar and Paul Saucier. For Stewart, the program was an opportunity to build a stronger foundation for decision-making and development.

"Our love for Irondale's traditions, deeply rooted in our community, drove our decision to apply to EDA," he said. "We were eager to revitalize our economic development strategy while staying true to our heartfelt community vision."



## The City of Irondale

*This is a rendering of Irondale's new municipal complex. Construction will begin in late 2025.*





Each city in the program begins by conducting a community economic vitality survey. In Irondale, the results confirmed some long-standing strengths while revealing key improvement areas. Residents expressed a desire for more sit-down restaurants, greater retail variety and improved signage throughout the city. They also emphasized the importance of green spaces, community events and maintaining the city's small-town feel.

"The survey was eye-opening and deeply moving," Stewart said. "The disconnect between our current offerings and community aspirations was heartbreaking but gave us a clear direction for growth."

That direction took shape in the form of Blueprint Irondale, the city's capstone project and comprehensive plan. Built with significant community input, the plan outlines long-term priorities related to transportation, housing, utilities, land use and public spaces. Designed to guide growth for the next 15 to 25 years, it now serves as a reference point for city planning, policy and investment.

"We poured our hearts into creating a master plan for the city called 'Blueprint Irondale,'" Stewart said. "This comprehensive vision document now serves as our guiding tool for all planning decisions in the city."

The plan focuses especially on enhancing what the city calls its "Charm Factors," the features that make Irondale attractive and distinct. These include parks, cultural events, aesthetics, recreation opportunities and a strong sense of place.

"It makes my heart sing when I see how this blueprint has unified our approach to growth and given us a clear direction for the future," Stewart said. "The community's enthusiastic response to this master plan has ignited excitement beyond our wildest dreams."

Since completing the academy, Irondale has hosted around 200 community events to strengthen



*Top: Irondale's Citizen Engagement Institute's seventh class graduated on Nov. 7, 2024.*

*Second from top: The mural painted on Irondale's City Hall says it all!*

*Third from top: Irondale empowers the next generation with their Young Entrepreneurs Day Program.*

*Bottom: Citizens enjoy Irondale's Jazz Fest at Beacon Park.*



engagement and unite people. Events range from farmers' markets to festivals and are designed to reflect what residents value most.

"These events have dramatically increased community engagement and helped us address our 'Charm Factor' needs," Stewart said. "Seeing families connect at these events brings tears of joy to my eyes as we build the Irondale we all envision."

The program has also helped city leaders adopt a more strategic business recruitment and retention approach.

"EDA has positively impacted our decision-making process by providing us with the tools to help us strategically make decisions," he said. "The program transformed us from being reactive to boldly proactive, equipping us with data-driven approaches while never losing sight of the human element."

The results speak for themselves. Irondale has seen a 20% increase in new businesses and a 15% increase in retention since adopting its new approach.

Additionally, leaders use the plan to evaluate future projects. They assess whether proposals align with the city's goals, can be supported with existing resources and offer meaningful impact.

The city is now finalizing a broader economic development strategy that builds on the momentum from Blueprint Irondale. It will address specific community needs identified in the survey and provide a targeted approach for business growth, quality-of-life improvements and long-term sustainability.

These EDA-led strategies laid the groundwork for Irondale's recent momentum. In 2025, the city adopted its largest-ever municipal budget at \$37 million, aimed at supporting new capital projects including a ballpark, municipal complex and library. Private development has also surged, with a recently completed shopping center attracting more than 45,000 weekly visitors and generating over \$1 million in revenue during its first year. Additional mixed-use construction is underway along Crestwood Boulevard, which is expected to bring dozens of new businesses to the area.

When asked what advice he would give to other cities interested in EDA, Stewart emphasized the value of collaboration, honesty and participation.

"Come with an open heart and be ready for transformation," he said. "Leave preconceptions at the door and prepare to be vulnerable about your community's challenges. The program demands time and emotional investment, but the returns are immeasurable."

Irondale's experience through the Economic Development Academy reflects what can happen when leaders commit to clear goals, strategic planning and public involvement. With its foundation rooted in history and its focus set on the future, Irondale is building more than growth. It is building trust, connection and a shared sense of purpose. ■



*Left: Mayor Stewart and community leaders proudly cut the ribbon on the Publix at Cahaba Crossing in November 2023, making it their first grocery store opening in 16 years. Right: Irondale's brand new destination dog park, Tails by the Rails at Ellard Park, officially opened for pups and people to enjoy in October 2024.*



# ACE Spotlight: Q&A with Saraland Mayor Howard Rubenstein



Caroline Carter • Communications Intern • ALM

**T**he Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program is excited to follow up with the city of Saraland and Mayor Howard Rubenstein, a past League president, to see how the program impacted the community and how it has grown in the past decade since receiving the ACE designation. ★

The ACE program, established in 2002, offers select small cities, with populations ranging from 2,000 to 18,000, assistance with resources and tools to help them promote long-term growth and prosperity. Through a comprehensive, three-phase approach, ACE uses the collective expertise of its partner organizations – ranging from state agencies and associations to banks, utilities, universities and others – to foster unique community development programs. In 2022, ACE became an official program of the Alabama League of Municipalities.

The city of Saraland first applied to the program in 2013 and earned the ACE status in 2015. Saraland, located in Mobile County, was incorporated in 1957 and has now surpassed 17,000 residents. Saraland is best known for its highly ranked city school system, which has excelled both scholastically and athletically. It was the first municipality in Mobile County or Baldwin County to split off from a county school system in 2006. The mayor attributes the city's growth to having a well-respected school system along with being a family-friendly, low-crime community.

★ In addition to being an ACE Community, the city has earned the honor of being designated a Certified Municipality, which means the mayor and the entire council have completed at least the basic Certified Municipal Official level of ALM's CMO program.

Mayor Rubenstein, a native of Chicago, shares more about himself and Saraland's ACE experience in the answers below.

## How long have you been mayor, and what did you do before?

I served two terms as councilmember (1996 and 2000). In 2004, I was elected as Saraland's first council president and was chosen again in 2008. In 2010, when our former mayor, Ken Williams, passed away unexpectedly, I became mayor. I was reelected in 2012, 2016 and 2020. I had practiced family medicine as a physician here since 1985 and recently



*Located adjacent to the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta, scenic boating, canoeing, fishing and other watersports opportunities abound in Saraland.*



*Pictured left to right: Councilmember Joe McDonald, Councilmember Veronica Hudson, Mayor Howard Rubenstein, Councilmember Natalie Moye, Councilmember Newton Cromer and Councilmember Wayne Biggs.*





retired from private practice. Prior to serving as an elected municipal official, I served as president of both the Saraland Area Chamber of Commerce and the Saraland Lions Club. I also founded a medical explorer post for the scouts in Saraland and volunteered for 38 years as team physician for Satsuma High School and subsequently Saraland High School.



**What role did you play as mayor in helping Saraland to become an ACE community?**

I worked closely with city and business leaders to achieve our ACE designation. I was a graduate of the inaugural class of Leadership Saraland and held a leadership role on the community advisory committee that did our comprehensive plan.

**How has the ACE program impacted your city?**

Saraland is very proud to be the first municipality in Mobile County to receive the ACE designation and is still the only municipality in Mobile County to hold this distinction.

**What does the ACE distinction mean to you?**

The ACE designation identifies our municipality as one of the outstanding communities in Alabama to live, work and play. This has helped with the marked growth and development of our city.



**How important was it to create a strategic plan through the ACE program?**

It was crucial to develop a strategic plan to help identify and achieve goals for our community. Planning is essential to have a community grow and mature in a positive manner.

**What are you doing to keep the public engaged and informed about the strategic plan and/or ACE?**

We are currently doing a formal update of our comprehensive plan. We have held several community meetings to gather input and suggestions from residents. We are also doing a city traffic study to address concerns that have been raised regarding the city’s ability to handle growth and development.



*The splash pad at Town Center Park opened on April 1, 2025.*



*Youth sports and activities are key quality of life services the city aims to provide its youngest residents.*



### What are some things that the city is doing to keep Saraland growing?

The city has had annexations and is optimizing resident services; supporting and improving public safety; adding and maintaining infrastructure; adding quality of life features; attracting new businesses; and supporting our outstanding city school system.



### What advice do you have for cities interested in participating in the program?

Get your entire city council and administration excited and engaged about starting the process. Be realistic about what you can accomplish. Understand the process and the requirements for designation. Set a timetable to meet ACE requirements. Partner with community organizations to achieve goals.

### Do you have some examples of changes or projects that have occurred since participating in ACE?

We have revised and updated our comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance and are currently conducting a comprehensive traffic study. We have also added a women's leadership program and have added several features to Town Center Park including a splashpad, playground and an adult fitness campaign court. We are also very excited about the construction of our new sportsplex, The Land, which sits on 100 acres, will have over 78,000 square feet of indoor space; five multi-purpose fields (football, soccer, field hockey and lacrosse); eight baseball/softball diamonds; nature trails and more.

### How did ACE help you establish new partners and community contacts?

We engaged with the Saraland Area Chamber of Commerce and city school leadership to work with the city. We also held and participated in additional networking opportunities and community events.



*Top: Saraland High School has appeared in the AHSAA 6A football championship the last three years and won their first title in 2022.  
Bottom: The Land is a premier sports, recreation and events complex offering a wide range of community amenities, which will include eight softball and baseball fields.*





## Can you describe the process on how Saraland was able to build a National Fitness Campaign court?

Saraland partnered with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama to build our adult fitness facility at Town Center Park. Shared resources were used to build the facility and offer this to our residents. Blue Cross helped with marketing this resource, and it has been very well used by our community.

## Saraland has expressed interest in participating in the newly established Healthy Alabama Communities program. Can you list what you hope to gain for your community by participating, and where you are in that process?

Councilmember Veronica Hudson, who is spearheading this initiative for Saraland, answered this question.

As a passionate advocate for community health and wellness, I am very interested in participating in this initiative to help improve the overall well-being of our residents. Since we are already an ACE community, we will build upon that as we start our initiative toward a Healthy Community.

By engaging in this program, I hope to achieve the following for our community:

- **Increase Access to Health Education** – provide resources and programs that promote preventive care, nutrition and chronic disease management.
- **Improve Physical Activity** – encourage active lifestyles through improved infrastructure, such as walking trails, community fitness programs and recreational opportunities.
- **Support Maternal & Infant Health** – strengthen breastfeeding education and maternal support systems to ensure healthier outcomes for mothers and babies.
- **Promote Smoke-Free & Healthy Environments** – expand efforts to create healthier public spaces by reducing tobacco exposure and supporting clean air initiatives.
- **Foster Community Engagement** – encourage collaboration among local government, businesses, schools and health care providers to implement sustainable health improvements.

## As a former president of ALM, what advice do you have for elected officials when it comes to participating in ALM events/activities and leading their community in general?

The League provides many essential and valuable services for its member municipalities. Advocacy, legal guidance, education and networking are just some of the many benefits of working with the League. I strongly encourage all municipal elected officials to participate in the many League activities as well as volunteer with League committees and projects.

Leadership has many facets. Compassion, understanding, professionalism, consensus building, the ability to compromise, humor, learning and teaching are all essential traits for municipal leaders. In the last 28 years, I have had the honor to meet and work with very dedicated and talented elected municipal officials from all across Alabama. I pray the generations that follow will continue to serve their cities and towns with distinction and honor. ■

*The city of Saraland is one of 23 communities in the state to be awarded a National Fitness Campaign fitness court in partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama.*







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# Over 240 Municipal Leaders Participate in Advocacy Day



—Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM—

In February, we hosted our annual ALM Advocacy Day with a record number of officials attending the one-day event at the Renaissance Hotel in Montgomery! The program was strategically designed to share local governments' concerns and issues impacting their desire to build strong resilient communities.

We were honored to hear from Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth, Senate Pro Tem Garlan Gudger Jr. and House Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter and to share our priorities with them.

Among the principal issues for us this year was sharing our commitment to working with policymakers to improve public safety and health care opportunities to support vibrant communities in Alabama. Therefore, we were proud to host two panels focused on both of these issues.

When it comes to public safety, we plan to continue looking for ways to collaborate with state leaders to ensure we not only improve recruitment and retention efforts but also give our officers the support and resources they need to keep the public safe.

The League also supports increased funding and statewide policy changes to provide accessibility to health care for all Alabamians; improve retention and recruitment of health care professionals; and expand health care services at existing facilities.

You can watch the full panel videos by scanning the QR codes on the following page.

Thank you to each of our panelists, guests and sponsors for your commitment to supporting Alabama's communities. ■









2025 Advocacy Day Recap



Health Care Panel



Public Safety Panel



# Alabama Municipal Advocacy Efforts Shine at Congressional City Conference

Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM

The Alabama League of Municipalities' advocacy and communications teams attended the National League of Cities' Congressional City Conference in Washington, D.C. on March 8-12, along with more than 180 municipal officials! The conference brought together over 3,000 elected and appointed city, town and village leaders from around the United States to focus on federal policy issues important to local governments. Among the national issues discussed during the conference were the impact of a disruption in federal funding on local governments, disaster relief and Federal Emergency Management Agency policies, public safety, appropriations and municipal bonds.

During the conference, ALM hosted several Alabama centric events, including a municipal caucus briefing, congressional delegation reception and breakfast panel with Sen. Tommy Tuberville and Sen. Katie Britt. The League extends its gratitude to both senators along with Rep. Robert Aderholt, Rep. Mike Rogers and Rep. Terri Sewell for meeting with members at ALM's events.

Additionally, the League was well represented in NLC meetings by Alabama members that serve on NLC's board, federal advocacy committees and constituency groups' boards. ALM staffers and leadership also attended several role-specific meetings that provided opportunities for peer collaboration.

Furthermore, members had an opportunity to hear keynote speeches from Vice President JD Vance, several of the president's cabinet heads, members of Congress, federal agency representatives and NLC leaders. They also participated in NLC's Hill Day program, which allowed them to meet with members of Congress directly at their offices on Capitol Hill. ■









# Dr. Cathy Randall Headlines Fifth Annual Women in Government Leadership Luncheon

Caroline Carter ♦ Communications Intern ♦ Alabama League of Municipalities

On a bright March Tuesday, the Alabama League of Municipalities hosted the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Women in Government Leadership Luncheon at the Montgomery Country Club. The event boasted speaker Dr. Catherine J. Randall, a pillar of leadership, education and civic engagement in Alabama.

Randall currently serves as chairwoman of the board of Pettus Randall Holdings, LLC and is the former director of the University Honors Programs at the University of Alabama. A two-time Ph.D. graduate of UA, she has been recognized as one of the university's top 31 women graduates of the century. Her career spans leadership roles in education, business and public service, including chairing numerous state boards and initiatives. A woman of intellect, service and enduring impact, Randall's words reminded every guest at the luncheon why women in government, and women like her, shape the legacy of leadership in Alabama and beyond.

In her inspiring keynote, Randall delivered a powerful message grounded in four simple but life-changing calls to action: Be excellent. Be ready. Be loved. Be grateful.

"We're encouraged these days to be authentic, and that is important," Randall said. "But today, I want to encourage us to also be who we were meant to be. To be all that we can be."

Encouraging women not to let self-doubt or fear hold them back, Randall shared the story of a young actress who only landed a lead role by choosing to believe in her potential. Her point: you cannot step into your purpose if you do not show up. "Success is 2% talent, 8% luck and 90% showing up," she said. "If someone thinks you can do it, say yes, and then work hard to do it."

She urged the audience to not only commit to excellence but to protect it from self-sabotage by replacing negative thoughts with empowering ones. "Our emotions don't have to imprison us," Randall said. "Negative thoughts don't have to imprison us. Every time one arrives, bat it away like a tennis player returning a serve."

Randall then shifted to a more personal truth: knowing your worth is non-negotiable. Drawing on wisdom from author Tish Harrison Warren and the words of Maya Angelou, she reminded the audience to root their identity in something deeper than titles or accomplishments. "Begin





every day beloved,” she said. “Remember that you are loved, and so is every person you meet. That truth fuels everything else.”

The final piece of her message centered on the power of gratitude to drive resilience and connection. “Truly owning our belovedness can only lead to one attitude: gratitude,” Randall said. “Gratitude helps us build the habits that shape excellence and readiness.”

To close, she offered a surprisingly poignant reference and video clip from the film “E.T.,” where the alien’s final words to the children who helped him leave Earth captured her entire message in just a few beats.

“Be good,” she said, smiling. “Or in my words: be excellent; be grateful; be loved; and most of all, be ready.” ■





# ALM HOSTS SOUTHERN MUNICIPAL CONFERENCE IN ORANGE BEACH

Kayla Bass • Deputy Director • ALM

Each spring, the Southern Municipal Conference (SMC), which consists of 15 state leagues from the southern region, gathers to discuss issues and opportunities that affect its cities and towns.

This year, on April 2-4, the Alabama League hosted the SMC Leadership Program with roughly 80 league directors and team members, municipal officials and partners, at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, to hear from subject matter experts on cybersecurity, best communication practices and a federal legislative update.

However, the most popular session year after year is when each state takes time to discuss issues particular to their state and membership. It is always a great opportunity to hear, peer to peer, which programs, legislation, events, etc., are being implemented in other states, so that we can prepare or implement similar efforts.

Our team appreciates each attendee that took the time to join us on Alabama's beautiful Gulf Coast! ■





# Alabama's Small Cities are Making a Big Impact Within the National League of Cities

Ebone Clifton • South Regional Manager & Member and Partner Engagement • NLC

**T**he National League of Cities (NLC) is an organization comprised of city, town and village leaders who are focused on improving the quality of life for their current and future constituents. For nearly 90 years, the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) has been a member of NLC and, together, we have joined forces to fight for the resources municipalities need to build communities where citizens can live, work and play, and where businesses can thrive.

In this article you will learn how even the smallest communities can have a significant impact within NLC. We will take a closer look at how two local leaders are serving as a valuable resource for all cities and towns of Alabama while working to increase the state's national impact and connections with local elected officials across the country.

First, we will hear from Mayor Bobby Scott of Center Point, Alabama. Mayor Scott serves as the first vice president of NLC's National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials (NBC-LEO) constituency group.



## How has your experience been with NLC, and why did you seek leadership?

From the time I was sworn in around November 2016, one of the first things I did was register for the NLC's City Summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There, I met NLC representatives with the Young Municipal Leaders Initiative. I attended several meetings with them, as well as some of the Race, Equity and Leadership (REAL) Council meetings, and it was an amazing experience. One of the most important things that I took away from that trip was meeting other elected officials who were first-time attendees and some that were long-time attendees and building those relationships, which I still have today.



## What are keys to getting involved within the organization coming from a small city?

Talking to other elected officials from the state of Alabama was very helpful to me, especially as a brand-new member. Officials from Selma, Midfield, Bessemer and Anniston were all instrumental in my decision to join and seek out leadership.

## How do you keep the city's needs at the forefront in your role as first vice president of NBC-LEO?

NLC has always provided us with great staff. They understand we have residents to serve back home, and we can get quite busy sometimes. We have been accommodated by being able to have NBC-LEO meetings after work hours and are given summaries and notes from meetings we may have missed. This helps alleviate the pressure of having to pick by allowing us to put our local citizens first.



## What kind of resources have you taken advantage of from your involvement with NLC?

NLC University (NLCU) taught me a lot early on in my term as a city councilman. It gave me access to people that have done amazing things in their own cities. More recently, the infrastructure hub classes have given us education and insight on applying for federal grants. The city of Center Point has already submitted a letter of intent to apply at the next NOFO.



Also, NLC's annual Congressional City Conference (CCC) creates the opportunity to speak to our officials in Congress in person and advocate for legislation that benefits our cities.

### Which benefit(s) are your favorite and why?

I really enjoy panel discussions with elected officials. There is always a unique perspective gained from the experience. These panels give you the opportunity to hear how other cities have handled challenges and allow you to ask questions while receiving real-time responses. Last year, I had the privilege of hosting a panel with a mayor and two tech experts, and it was very insightful.



### As a small city, what is the most unique part about being a member of NLC?

My city's population is approximately 16,400. You would think smaller cities would be in the background of large organizations like NLC, but I have learned that small cities are the majority and that is a constant reminder that we are not alone in the needs and issues we face. ALL of us are eligible for leadership opportunities within NLC, NBC-LEO and any other committees, member councils or constituency groups. Whether your city has a population of 300 or 16,000, the voices of small cities are being heard on the national level through the involvement of other small city leaders, just like me.

### How have you and/or your city grown as a member of NLC?

We have grown from the knowledge gained and brought it back home to implement. This includes learning about best practices, grants and leadership. There is always renewed energy after leaving NLC events. You return home motivated and confident in yourself to continue fighting for your city.

### Why should more small communities in Alabama get involved with NLC?

I love Alabama. I was born and raised here in a small town and now as a mayor in a different small community than the one I was raised in, I am more aware of the benefit NLC can bring to them. This can range from how to access infrastructure improvements, lessons on governing a diverse community, lessons on being a better leader or networking with other small towns in different states. One thing I have learned is we all face similar issues around the country and my fellow brothers and sisters in Alabama deserve the opportunity to be the best we can be.

Thanks, Mayor Scott! Now, let us shift our conversation from NLC's constituency group leader and hear from NLC's board member, Councilmember Clark Hopper II from Rainbow City, Alabama.

### How has your experience been with NLC, and why did you choose to become a board member?

Since taking office in 2020, our city council has always gone to the NLC conference in Washington, D.C. From year one, I was so impressed with how NLC ran the program and the valuable networking with other cities, I was certain that if given the opportunity





to serve, I would jump at the chance. Therefore, in 2023, I applied for a committee position and was placed on community development. This year I applied for a board position and was selected. My hope is to become more active and learn new ideas for my community inspired by other cities.

### **What are keys to getting involved within the organization from a small city?**

The biggest key is to make time to get involved and take advantage of over 100 years of knowledge that comes with the NLC. Commitment is very important. I know most small-town leaders work, some are retired, but you must make time to read and study to learn new ideas that may help your city. I found the NLC website covers a lot of topics and has free online classes, which really benefits the small-town budget. Small town leaders must understand NLC does a lot for us and provides great information; we just have to use the toolbox and ask questions to learn.



### **How do you keep the city's needs at the forefront in your role as an NLC board member?**

My plan is first to listen at the different meetings for other cities who share the same issues as Rainbow City. Then, network with them on how they handle things and share how we do it. I will also watch out for any grants, federal or state level, which could help with growth.

### **What kind of resources have you taken advantage of from your involvement of NLC?**

I have taken advantage of mainly the website and have signed up for some classes through the NLC University program. The virtual meetings are priceless when you attend them and learn from so many other cities. Networking is such a valuable resource for cities.

### **Which benefit(s) are your favorite and why?**

Without a doubt, I would say networking face-to-face or via virtual platforms. I am a people person, so this works better for me. Since I am so new to the board, there will probably be a lot more benefits to look forward to, and that is exciting.

### **As a small city, what is the most unique part about being a member of NLC?**

I think learning small cities make up the largest group in the United States is empowering. Small cities are made up of populations of 50,000 or less, which we were told is 60% of the cities in the country. This really levels the playing field in some areas and gives the small cities a louder voice. Hill Day is a great example of this. NLC sets up annual meetings in Washington, D.C. with senators and congressman, or their staff, to talk about issues in their cities.





## How have you and/or your city grown as a member of NLC?

We have learned a lot about issues and how the federal government can help through grants or programs. This gives us another source to aid our city in matters where the state cannot.

## Why should more small communities in Alabama get involved with NLC?

South Alabama has a lot of poor cities and counties that have problems that I never knew about. In some communities in Alabama, the citizens may have to travel over 50 miles to find a medical clinic, or struggle with their water source being contaminated from well water or not having access to a water treatment plant in the area. These are all issues brought to my attention in a class the Alabama League of Municipalities put together with the mental health advocates in the state. Small cities should get involved to gain access to resources that can help.

As the recognized voice of Alabama's cities and towns, ALM's members benefit from a variety of member programs, services and activities that are impossible to accomplish alone. ALM has worked to strengthen municipal government through advocacy, training and the advancement of effective local leadership for the past nine decades.

Yet, we know we can do more together – which is why the League encourages you to not only continue your membership with ALM, but to also consider being a member of NLC. If you are already a member, consider getting involved and representing Alabama on the national level, just like Mayor Scott and Councilmember Hopper.

NLC's affordable membership not only provides a myriad of resources that support you as a local leader – such as invaluable networking opportunities with your peers from across the country – but also includes services that *directly* impact your community. Membership covers all municipal employees as well as the local elected officials. To learn more about NLC membership or how dues are calculated, please visit [www.nlc.org/membership](http://www.nlc.org/membership) by scanning the QR code.

We thank you for your leadership and service. If you have any questions, please contact ALM at (334) 262-2566 or NLC at (202) 626-3160. ■



## BECOME A NLC MEMBER



Membership with NLC includes **exclusive access, tools, and resources** available to your entire city, town or village!

**Scan the QR Code** to complete the NLC interest form and connect with the NLC membership representative for your region

*"The National League of Cities is the oldest and largest national association serving local government."*



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Newton Cromer - *Councilmember, Saraland, Vice Chair*

Scan the QR code for more information about these Committees on the League's Officers and Committees page.



## Make plans to join the League for training in 2025!

### • May 13 - 16

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### • August

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### • October /November

Regional Orientation Trainings, several locations around the state  
(October 1-2, Tuscaloosa; October 29-30, Montgomery;  
November 5-6, Huntsville; November 12-13, Daphne)

### • November 19 - 22

NLC City Summit, Salt Lake City, UT (Learn more: [www.nlc.org](http://www.nlc.org))

# SAVE

# THE

# DATE!

2025 CMO Training Calendar

Visit [www.almonline.org/UpcomingTraining](http://www.almonline.org/UpcomingTraining) frequently for training and updated registration information.



# Navigating ADEM Open Burning Regulations: A Guide for Municipalities

Aubrey H. White III, P.E. • Air Division Chief • Alabama Department of Environmental Management

It is important for Alabama citizens and municipalities to know that, except under certain criteria, open burning is generally prohibited by law in the state of Alabama for both health and safety reasons.

In February 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency significantly lowered the air quality standard for fine particulate matter, or PM<sub>2.5</sub>. This pollutant can be inhaled and cause serious illnesses, especially in children, older adults, and people with heart or lung disease. While PM<sub>2.5</sub> in air can originate from many different sources, open burning accounts for about 60% alone. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) has regulations regarding open burning to ensure all areas of the state have healthy air quality.

## Permissible Open Burning

According to ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-3-3-.01, open burning is generally prohibited, unless it meets specific criteria. The regulations outline several exceptions where open burning may be allowed. These exceptions include:

- Cooking food for human consumption on non-commercial premises.
  - Recreational or ceremonial fires.
  - Fires to abate a fire hazard, as declared by the governing fire department.
  - Fires to control disease or pests.
  - Fires for training personnel in firefighting methods that meet all requirements of ADEM Admin. Code r. 335-3-11-.02(12), which deals with asbestos.
  - Fires for the disposal of dangerous materials when there is no practical alternative, and when approved by the director of ADEM.
  - Fires for recognized agricultural, silvicultural, range and wildlife management practices.
  - Fires set in salamanders or other devices for heating purposes at construction sites, using only specific listed fuels.
- These exceptions are very specific, and any open burning that does not fall under these categories requires careful review.

## Burning Vegetation and Untreated Wood

If conducted under the correct conditions, the open burning of vegetation or untreated wood is authorized provided that the following requirements are met:

**Location:** The burning must take place on the property where the combustible fuel originates. This means that tree limbs, vegetative debris and untreated wood may not be collected and transported to another location for burning.

**Distance:** The fire must be at least 500 feet from the nearest occupied dwelling not located on the same property. In other words, a homeowner may open burn their tree limbs within 500 feet of their own home but must ensure the fire is at least 500 feet from their neighbors.

**Traffic Safety:** The burning must be controlled to avoid creating a traffic hazard on public streets and roads.

**Materials:** Only vegetation and untreated wood may be burned. All other materials, such as trash, garbage, scrap, tires, rubber, asphalt products, paper, cardboard, chemicals, oils, plastics, vinyl materials, insulation, and treated or painted wood are strictly prohibited from open burning.

**Timing:** Initial burning is allowed only between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m., and no additional material can be added to the fire between 3 p.m. and 8 a.m. the following day.

**Ventilation:** Burning is allowed only with good ventilation, when the wind is blowing away from any built-up areas.

**Supervision:** The fire must be attended to at all times.

**Burn Ban:** Open burning is prohibited May 1 through Oct. 31 in the following counties: Baldwin, DeKalb, Etowah, Jefferson, Lawrence, Madison, Mobile, Montgomery, Morgan, Shelby, Russell and Talladega.



## Violations of ADEM Open Burning Regulations

ADEM's Air Division is tasked with enforcing the open burning regulations. Its inspectors visit areas of the state every week looking for environmental issues, including unauthorized open burning, and responding to citizen complaints. Here are some of the most common violations cited:



**Burning Prohibited Materials:** It is strictly prohibited to burn heavy oils, asphalt products, plastics, vinyl materials, insulation, paper, cardboard, natural or synthetic rubber, salvage or scrap materials, chemicals, garbage, treated or painted wood, or any trash. While untreated wood and vegetation are allowed to be combusted, we frequently see these other materials mixed in or burned exclusively.

**Imported Vegetation:** The regulations specify that burning must occur on the property where the combustible fuel originates. This means that imported vegetation (such as tree limbs) may not be moved from the property where it was cut to another site for burning.

**Ignoring Distance Requirements:** Burning must not occur within 500 feet of an occupied dwelling, as detailed above.

**Burning During Prohibited Months:** Even if all other requirements are met, open burning is not allowed during the burn ban in listed counties.

## Consequences of Non-Compliance

Over the past 10 years, ADEM issued numerous enforcement actions including enforcement orders with an assessed civil penalty to individuals, businesses, counties and municipalities for violations of open burning regulations.

## Recommendations for Municipalities

To ensure compliance and reduce unauthorized open burning, municipalities should consider the following:

**Educate Staff:** Ensure all relevant staff are thoroughly trained on ADEM open burning regulations and the specific conditions that must be met.

**Review Local Burn Permit Procedures:** Some fire departments have issued local burn permits without considering state open burning regulations. Review your permit process to ensure those that receive permits are aware of these requirements.

**Communicate with Residents:** Educate residents about what materials can and cannot be burned, and the importance of compliance.

**Monitor and Enforce:** Regularly monitor burning activities and enforce any local ordinances to prevent violations.

**Seek Guidance:** Contact ADEM with any questions regarding specific open burning situations. ADEM's open burning regulations can be found on our website or by searching for "335-3-3-.01" with your favorite search engine.

By understanding and adhering to ADEM's regulations, municipalities can effectively manage open burning, protect air quality, and ensure the safety and well-being of their communities. We encourage you to contact ADEM at (334) 271-7879 or 271-7897 if you have any questions regarding open burning. ■





# A Vision for Alabama's Workforce: Empowering Alabamians for the Jobs of the Future

Greg Reed • Secretary • Alabama Department of Workforce

**A**labama stands at a pivotal moment. As our economy grows and evolves, so too must our workforce. The demand for skilled labor continues to rise, and it is our responsibility to ensure that Alabamians are prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern job market. As the Alabama workforce secretary, my mission is clear: to educate, train and employ our people in the in-demand jobs of the future. To achieve this, we must embrace innovative solutions, invest in workforce development and create pathways that connect Alabamians to meaningful careers.

Let us take a look at where we have been in the past, and where we stand here today. For years, the state of Alabama has had numerous different workforce development initiatives, programs and institutions all working independently in silos, often without coordination. This was a roadblock that stood in the way of our state reaching its full potential in training and employing the workforce of tomorrow.

Gov. Kay Ivey, the Alabama Legislature, our state's business community and many others recognized this flaw in our workforce system and went to work to try to solve it. Last year, the Alabama Legislature passed and Gov. Ivey signed into law an ambitious package of bills called "Working for Alabama." When we began work on these bills, I was serving as president pro tem of the Alabama Senate, and I was proud to work to pass these key pieces of legislation.

This ambitious legislative agenda created a brand-new state agency – The Alabama Department of Workforce, which Gov. Ivey tasked me with leading earlier this year. The goal of this new department is to consolidate all of the state's various workforce development efforts under one roof, with centralized coordination and planning to make sure that all of our work in this space is aligned and as effective as possible.

This is going to be a game changer for our state. With this new alignment and coordination between our state's workforce development assets, along with input from the business community on what jobs and what skills are needed most, we can create an environment where all Alabamians will have access to the skills, training, and therefore jobs needed to create great careers and to contribute significantly to our state's economy.

One of the most pressing challenges facing Alabama's workforce is the skills gap. Many employers struggle to find qualified workers to fill positions in high-demand fields such as advanced manufacturing, health care, information technology and construction. At the same time, too many Alabamians remain unemployed or underemployed because they lack the necessary training and credentials.

To bridge this gap, we are utilizing training programs and industry partnerships that allow individuals to gain hands-on experience while earning a paycheck. Apprenticeships provide a direct link between education and employment, ensuring that training aligns with industry needs. Additionally, we are strengthening collaboration between community colleges and technical schools with the business community to ensure our workforce training programs are preparing students for real-world careers.

A key component of workforce development is ensuring that our educational institutions are equipping students with the skills employers demand. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in high schools and community colleges provide valuable training opportunities, yet they must be continuously updated to keep pace with industry advancements.





Our strategy includes expanding CTE offerings in fields such as cybersecurity, automotive technology and skilled trades, providing students with a competitive edge in the job market. We are also working to increase awareness among parents and students about the value of technical careers. A four-year college degree is not the only path to success; many high-paying, fulfilling careers require technical training rather than a traditional bachelor's degree.

While Alabama's unemployment rate remains low, workforce participation lags behind national averages. Too many capable Alabamians are sitting on the sidelines. We must re-engage these individuals and connect them to opportunities.

The future of workforce development in Alabama must also include a commitment to innovation. Technology is reshaping industries at a rapid pace, and we must stay ahead of the curve. That means integrating digital skills training into all workforce programs, ensuring that workers are prepared for the technological demands of today's jobs.

Furthermore, we are leveraging data analytics to better understand workforce trends and align our training programs accordingly. By analyzing labor market data, we can make informed decisions about where to allocate resources and how to best prepare workers for emerging industries.

We also must ensure that our workforce development efforts apply to all parts of our state. Workforce development cannot be limited to urban centers; it must reach every corner of Alabama. Rural communities face unique challenges, including limited access to training facilities and fewer job opportunities. Our state has been committed over the years to expanding broadband access and virtual learning opportunities so that individuals in rural areas can receive the same high-quality training as those in larger cities.

Additionally, we are working with local leaders to attract new businesses to rural areas, ensuring that economic growth is spread equitably across Alabama. By providing incentives for companies to invest in rural communities and training local workers to fill these new jobs, we can create a more balanced and resilient economy.

The success of our workforce development efforts depends on collaboration. Businesses, educators, government agencies and community organizations must work together to build a system that meets the needs of both workers and employers. I encourage business leaders to engage with workforce training programs, offer apprenticeships and help shape the curriculum to reflect industry demands.

For job seekers, I urge you to take advantage of the many training opportunities available. Whether through community colleges, technical schools or apprenticeship programs, there are numerous pathways to a rewarding career. No matter your background or previous experience, there is a place for you in Alabama's evolving workforce.

As we look to the future, my vision is clear: a state where every Alabamian has access to quality education, training and employment opportunities. By investing in our people, removing barriers to workforce participation and embracing innovation, we can build a stronger, more prosperous Alabama for generations to come. ■





# The Historical Evolution of Priceville: 50 Years in the Making

Sam Heflin, Mayor  
City of Priceville

In the heart of Morgan County, Alabama, the city of Priceville holds a rich history, telling tales of perseverance, growth and community spirit. Priceville was incorporated as a town in 1975 and officially became a city in 2022 after reaching the threshold of having more than 2,000 residents. Our journey to understanding Priceville began more than two centuries ago, unraveling the story of its first settlers, the morphing of its landscape and the birth of a community that thrives on the foundations of its past.

## The Evolution of Priceville

In the early 19th century, a wave of opportunity and the promise of new beginnings drew families to an area they called Centerville. In 1818, the Ratliffs became the region's pioneers, laying down the roots of what would eventually become Priceville. Their arrival marked the beginning of a settlement that thrived amidst the challenges of an untamed frontier. The first voting precinct in this community found its place at William Johnstone's home - a symbol of the democratic ideals that were slowly spreading across the land.

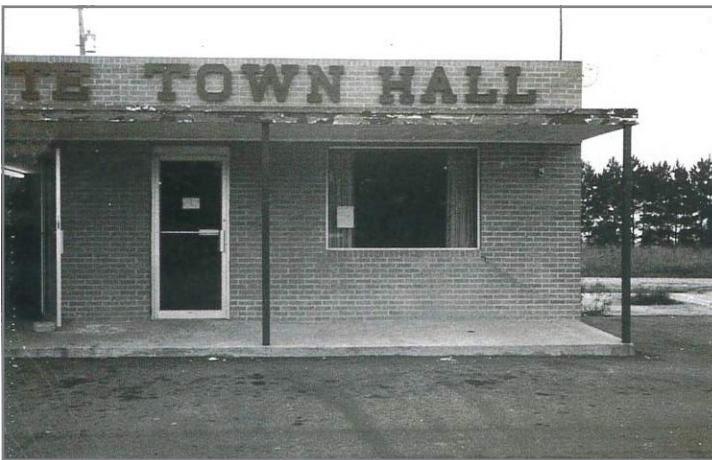
The narrative of Priceville cannot be recounted without the mention of the Price family, whose lineage can be traced back to a Welsh clan landing in Point Comfort, Virginia, in 1611. By 1820, a descendant, Robert Price, found his way to Alabama, settling first in Lawrence County before his descendants would eventually become synonymous with the area now known as Priceville. The Prices and Ratliffs not only contributed their names to this land but also their indelible legacy of resilience and community building.

Following the War of 1812, settlers were drawn to fertile lands at the foot of Priceville Mountain, a region ripe for farming and innovation. James Ratliff I, securing land grants from President James Monroe and his successors, became one of this area's pioneering spirits. The Ratliffs were instrumental in developing a key resource for the time—saltpeter from their mine, which played a pivotal role in the Civil War due to its use in manufacturing ammunition.

The Ratliff family home, built in 1847 on Cave Springs Road, remains a standing hallmark of the era's architectural ingenuity and the family's presence in the region. This house, with its wide verandas and breezeways, bridges the past with the present, reminding us of the community's enduring spirit.

The area underwent significant transformation through the years, with the establishment of Ratliff Estates in 1963, marking the development of the region into a residential community. Ratliff Estates is located on Highway 67 and Price Mountain Drive and incorporates Autumn Wood Trail. As soon as you turn off Highway 67, you will see one of the historic cemeteries, the Price Family Cemetery. Yet, it was the enduring legacy of Dr. Charles Wesley Price, a son who followed his father to this land in 1825, who truly shaped the community. Establishing a sprawling plantation, medical practice and contributing economically and socially to the area, Dr. Price's family name would eventually become the namesake of Priceville, a decision immortalized by local merchant Bob Carter after the Civil War.

The Price family home saw five generations, including two notable descendants: Dr. James E. Price, who continued



**From Tractors to Fire Trucks** - Left: The first Town Hall was simply a store front in a shopping center. Right: Priceville's first fire truck was a 1953 Studebaker, obtained from the U.S. Forestry Service.



his father's medical practice, and Charles Littleton Price, who became a distinguished attorney in Decatur after studying law at the University of Alabama and under the Hon. H.A. Sharpe, an associate justice of the Alabama Supreme Court.

The community's evolution from agricultural lands to a modern city was not rapid but steady. With generations of the Prices living at the family home, the narrative of evolution, resilience and community fortitude continued.

### **The Incorporation and Rise of a Community**

The journey from a set of holdings and plantations to an incorporated city was propelled by leaders such as Bruce Lemmond and Percy Sharp, whose visions for a cohesive and prosperous community led to the establishment of modern-day Priceville.

This transformation has been a collective effort,

highlighting the city's strength drawn from its roots and the vision for its future. Serving as mayor of Priceville for 34 years, from 1987 to 2021, Melvin Duran had a vision for Priceville, along with his council. Many improvements took place under their leadership including obtaining state grants for major projects.

Fast forward to the present day, Priceville is set to celebrate its 50th anniversary in April 2025. Priceville has burgeoned into the fastest-growing city in Morgan County and is a beacon of progress and opportunity. I am honored to be serving in my fifth year as mayor of our great city and am excited about our momentum.

Today, Priceville stands as a beacon of heritage and progress, a city that honors its past while eagerly embracing its future. From the Ratliff and Price families' pioneering spirit to the modern-day citizens who call this city home,

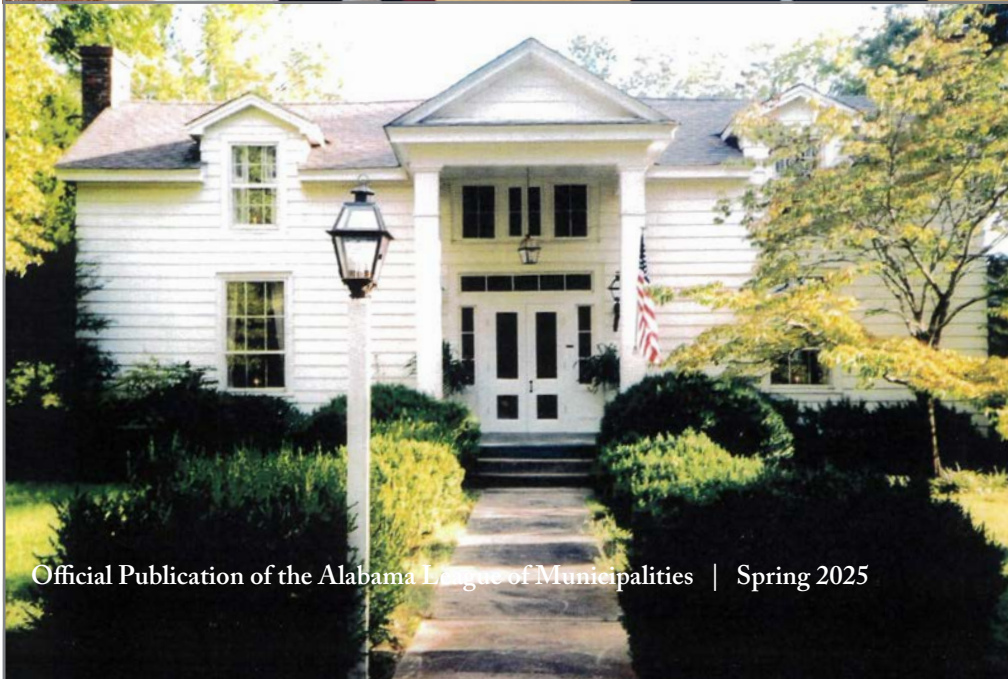
Priceville remains a lasting legacy of the enduring strength of the community and the unwavering spirit of growth and development. The story of Priceville is not merely about its founders but about every individual who has called this city home, contributing to its rich history and promising future.

With a population now exceeding 3,800, Priceville sits strategically just off Exit 334 on Interstate 65. Its proximity to neighboring cities and states makes it an attractive hub for commerce and residency. Priceville boasts robust police and fire departments, newer schools with state-of-the-art facilities and a flourishing real estate market due to its advantageous location, educational excellence and business growth.

The city's infrastructure has kept pace with its growth. A modern courthouse has replaced the old town hall, serving multiple functions including municipal government offices, the police

***Passing the Torch** - Top: In 1987, Mayor Matine Bates resigned and Melvin Duran Jr. started his 36 year reign as mayor.*

***Living History** - Bottom: The Ratliff home is the oldest structure in Priceville still in use.*





department and court room. An emblem of the city's burgeoning spirit is the new event center, which opened in 2023. It not only offers a venue for various events but also serves as a new polling place.

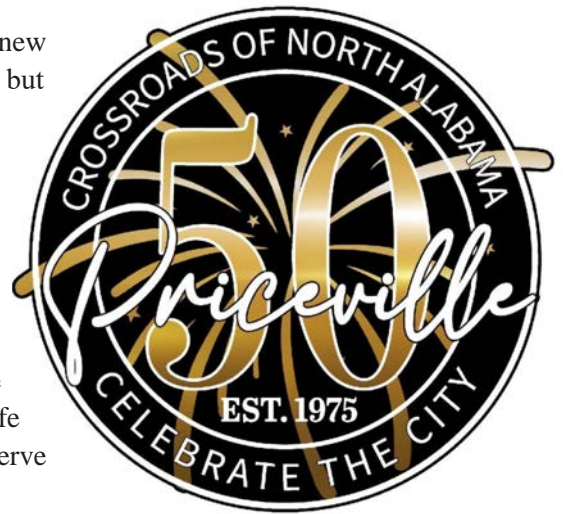
The retail landscape in Priceville has also expanded dramatically and several retail stores have opened in the last few years. Priceville now has a full grocery store, drug store, restaurants, medical services, small shops, financial institutions and a new hardware store opening this month. The business opportunities are endless with the growth in population, yet there is still a need for so much more.

However, the city is not all business, Priceville takes pride in its scenic beauty, surrounded by a picturesque landscape of mountains and the Tennessee River, and is home to Wheeler Wildlife Refuge, a sanctuary for birding and wildlife education. Moreover, Veterans Park and the Morgan County Veterans Memorial serve as the city's green lungs and as tributes to its heroes.

Municipal services have also modernized with contracted trash pickups and active communication facilitated through a quarterly city newsletter. The sewer systems introduction; the conversion from septic systems; the blossoming subdivisions in place of farmland; and improved traffic management are hallmarks of a city on the move. Priceville today, with its comprehensive services, amenities and continued expansion, stands proudly, representing not just a city that is growing but one that is evolving with intention and purpose.

As we look back at the city's lineage and gaze into its bright future, one cannot help but marvel at how far the city of Priceville has come. It is a city where history and progress walk hand in hand, where the echoes of the past are met with the modern cadence of a vibrant, growing community. Priceville represents the embodiment of the indomitable spirit of human progress, a beacon of light in Morgan County, shining ever brighter as it looks forward to the next chapter in its remarkable story.

As mayor of Priceville, I would like to invite everyone to come join us on April 26 from 2 p.m. until 9 p.m. for a free concert and fireworks in honor of our 50th anniversary. We look forward to seeing you! ■



***Dream Team pursues Economic Development** - Priceville is one of two cities to have the double distinction of being an Advanced Certified Municipality in the CMO program and having just finished the League's Economic Development Academy course.*



***Time to write the next chapter** - Priceville's current City Hall and two of nine fire trucks. A long way from where we started with tractors and second-hand machinery.*



# CONVENTION 2025

## HUNTSVILLE MAY 13-16 QUICK GUIDE



Final schedule subject to change. See the event app\* for up-to-date information.

### TUESDAY, MAY 13

- 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Registration and Help Desk
- 2 – 3 p.m. **Opening Session:** Welcome, Gov. Kay Ivey Address, NLC CEO & Executive Director Clarence Anthony Address, President's Farewell Address & Award Presentations
- 3 – 5 p.m. Ask Your Attorney Booths
- 3:15 – 4:30 p.m. **General Session:** Navigating Change  
Greg Canfield, Burr & Forman LLP
- 5 – 7 p.m. **Welcome Reception** (hosted by ALM and the City of Huntsville)

### WEDNESDAY, MAY 14 — CITY SHIRT DAY Wear your city shirt today with pride!

- 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Registration and Help Desk
- 8:30 – 9:30 a.m. **General Session:** A Community of Possibilities  
Matt Lehrman, Speaker, Social Prosperity Partners
- 9:45 – 10:45 a.m. **Concurrent Sessions:** Navigating PFAS Litigation: Securing Municipal Remediation Funds; Cybersecurity Services Funding Opportunities; Community Safety – Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
- 10:45 a.m. – Noon Ask Your Attorney Booths
- 11 a.m. – Noon AMIC Annual Business Meeting
- Noon – 2 p.m. Lunch on Your Own
- Noon – 1:30 p.m. **ACE and EDA Alumni Lunch** *(This event is by invitation only)*
- 1 – 3:30 p.m. Alabama Association of Municipal Clerks Meeting "Clerks Day" *(see app for more information)*
- 1:30 – 5 p.m. Ask Your Attorney Booths
- 2 – 3:30 p.m. **Concurrent Sessions:** Veterans Affairs in Local Communities; The Year of Trails; Alabama & the U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission (250th Birthday)
- 3:30 – 6 p.m. **Municipal Marketplace Reception**
- 6:30 – 9:30 p.m. **Volkert Centennial Rooftop Reception** *(Pre-register by scanning the QR code, right)*



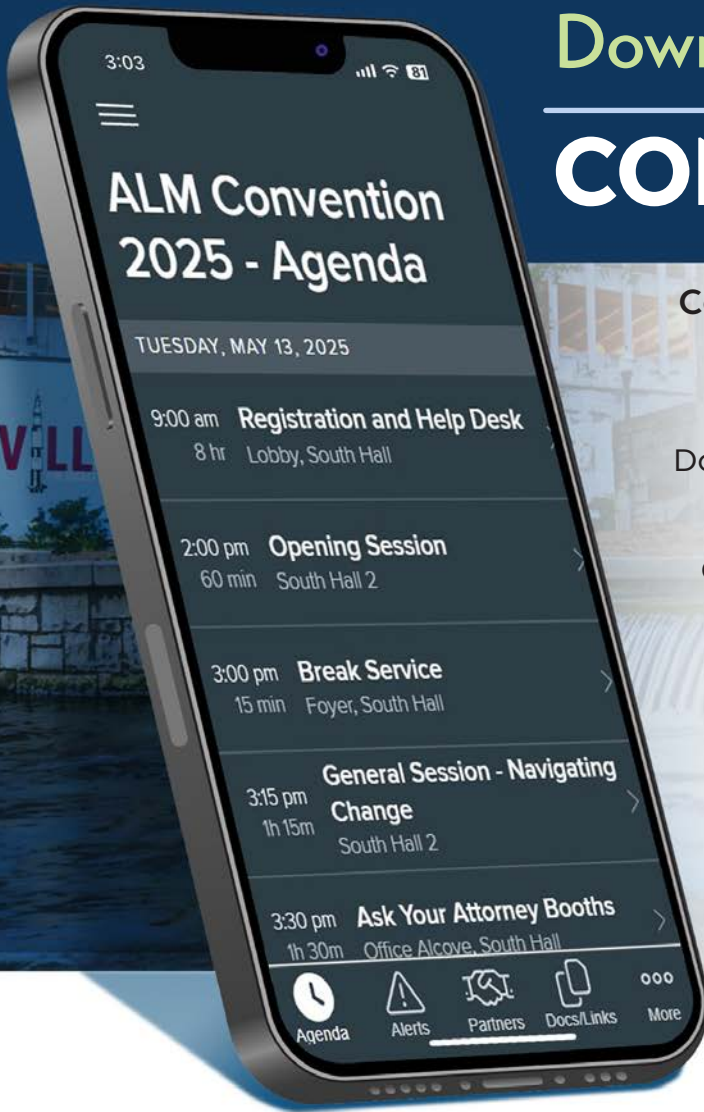
### THURSDAY, MAY 15

- 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Registration and Help Desk
- 7:30 – 10:30 a.m. **Municipal Marketplace Breakfast**
- 10:30 a.m. – Noon Roundtable Discussions
- Noon – 2 p.m. Lunch on Your Own
- 2 – 3:30 p.m. **General Session:** Ask Your Attorney  
ALM Legal Team; James Stanley, Esq., City of Birmingham, AAMA President
- 4 – 5 p.m. **Business Session:** Board Reports, Election of Officers
- 6:30 – 8 p.m. President's Dinner
- 8 p.m. Closing Reception

**Download our FREE convention app!**\* For the complete convention schedule, locations, speaker bios and links to Municipal Marketplace vendors, download the Yapp app from your app store.



# Download the Yapp app for **CONVENTION 2025!**



Convention schedules, speaker bios, links to  
Municipal Marketplace vendors  
– all at your fingertips!

Download the Yapp app from the Apple or Google  
Play store.

Once it has downloaded, click the plus sign in the  
top right corner of the Yapp app.

You will be prompted to "Add a Yapp;" in the  
search box, enter the following: **ALM2025**

Scan this QR code  
to load the Yapp app  
for Convention!



## Wondering what to do or where to eat while in Huntsville for the Convention?

The biggest takeaway when considering things to do in the **Rocket City** is you have lots of choices.

You'll find a variety of options, whether you're interested in education, arts, nature, shopping, night life or a memorable meal!

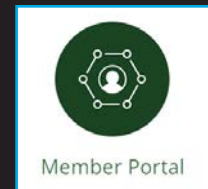
Scan the QR code to visit the Huntsville Convention and Visitors Bureau's website.





# Opt In to ALM's New Text Messaging Service

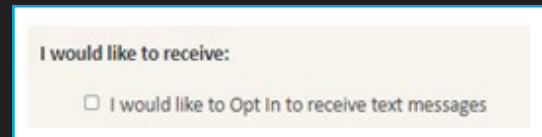
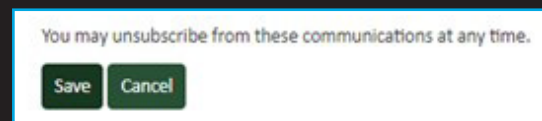
1. Go to ALM's website <https://almonline.org>
2. Click on the **Member Portal** icon and type in your username and password.
3. Verify that your Mobile Phone number is listed in the mobile phone field.



4. If your mobile phone number is missing from the **About Me** tab, click the pencil in the top right-hand corner. Enter your number, then click Save.

A screenshot of the "About Me" profile page. It has tabs for "About Me", "Change Password", and "Communication Preferences". The "About Me" tab is active, showing fields for Email (alministest@gmail.com), Mobile Phone ((334) 267-5309), and Work Phone ((334) 262-2566). A yellow pencil icon is in the top right corner.

5. Click on the **Communications Preferences** tab to see the list of communication options.
6. Select "I would like to Opt In to receive text messages" from the options, then click Save.
7. You have now opted in to receive text messages and will receive a Welcome text message within 24 hours. You can sign out of your account now.

A screenshot of the "Communications Preferences" form. It has a heading "I would like to receive:" and a checkbox labeled "I would like to Opt In to receive text messages".A screenshot of the bottom of the "Communications Preferences" form. It shows the text "You may unsubscribe from these communications at any time." and two buttons: "Save" and "Cancel".

**Congratulations! Welcome to the ALM text alert system!**



# Alabama Emergency Preparedness: Building Resilience Before, During and After Disasters

Jaleesa Diggins • Communications & Public Relations Specialist • Alabama Emergency Management Agency

**T**he Alabama Emergency Management Agency's (AEMA) mission is to coordinate, guide and assist our emergency management partners in planning, responding to and recovering from critical incidents and disasters, promoting community safety and building a more resilient Alabama.

AEMA plays a crucial role in protecting the state's citizens by coordinating emergency preparedness, response and recovery efforts. It also works to mitigate the impacts of disasters such as tornadoes and hurricanes by providing resources, information and support to local governments and individuals.

## SEVERE WEATHER PREPARATION

Severe weather season is here; now is the time to prepare. Spring brings the threat of tornadoes, and summer brings hurricanes, which Alabamians are no strangers to. Being prepared is not just a good idea but essential for survival. Now is the time to take action.

The first thing to understand is the difference between a watch and a warning. When weather forecasters issue a tornado watch, the conditions are favorable for inclement weather. When a tornado warning is issued, it means an actual tornado has been seen on the National Weather Service's radar. AEMA recommends purchasing a NOAA weather radio and having extra batteries to take to your safe place, which is the best way to get your severe weather notifications.

The second is to develop your family emergency plan. Designate a safe place in your home, ideally on the lowest floor, most central to your home, away from windows. A storm shelter or basement are better options. Practice drills with your family and establish a plan with an out-of-state contact person for emergencies.

Third, be sure your emergency kit is filled with essential items such as a NOAA weather radio, flashlight, whistle, first aid kit, non-perishable foods, water and extra batteries. Keep important documents in a digital cloud or waterproof container. Also, download weather apps on your smartphone and pay close attention to the local weather forecasts.

If you are a coastal citizen, developing your emergency plan, learning your evacuation zones and flood risk, and strengthening your home is important.

Evacuation zones are typically used in coastal areas to help you determine the best route to move out when needed.

Know this information ahead of a storm so you can be prepared to move quickly if ordered.

Strengthen your home by trimming trees to prevent damage from high winds and secure outdoor items such as patio furniture and garbage cans. Also, consider installing hurricane shutters or reinforced windows.

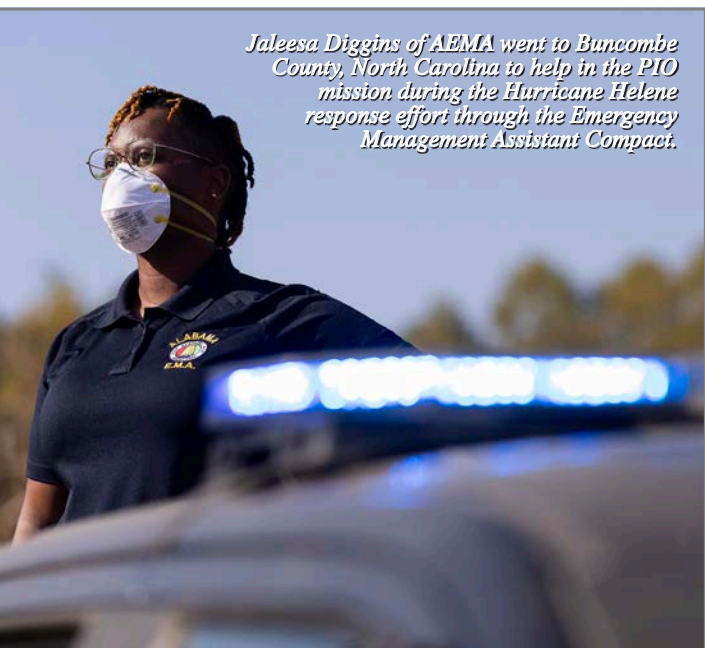
Prepare for power outages by having backup power sources such as generators, extra flashlight batteries and charging electronic devices before the storm arrives.

Learn about your area to know your flood risk, have sandbags available in a flood-prone area and move valuable items to high grounds and secure them.

If your home is in a community, familiarize yourself with its emergency plans and resources and know the location of emergency shelters and services. If your area is unaffected by the storm, you can volunteer with disaster relief efforts once the storm is gone.

The more prepared citizens are, the more resilient Alabama will stay. Be proactive when severe weather approaches. Being prepared means protecting yourself, loved ones and neighbors.

*Jaleesa Diggins of AEMA went to Buncombe County, North Carolina to help in the PIO mission during the Hurricane Helene response effort through the Emergency Management Assistant Compact.*





When severe weather is forecasted, follow only trusted sources, such as local meteorologists, the National Weather Service (Huntsville, Birmingham, Mobile, or Tallahassee) and your local and state Emergency Management Agency (EMA).

## HOW CAN LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS HELP?

Local elected and appointed officials can help their citizens be prepared by leading before, during and after disasters. Disaster response and recovery are more effective when senior officials are familiar with emergency management processes. Visit your local and state emergency management agencies to learn as much as possible before a disaster happens.

## Build Resilience Before a Disaster

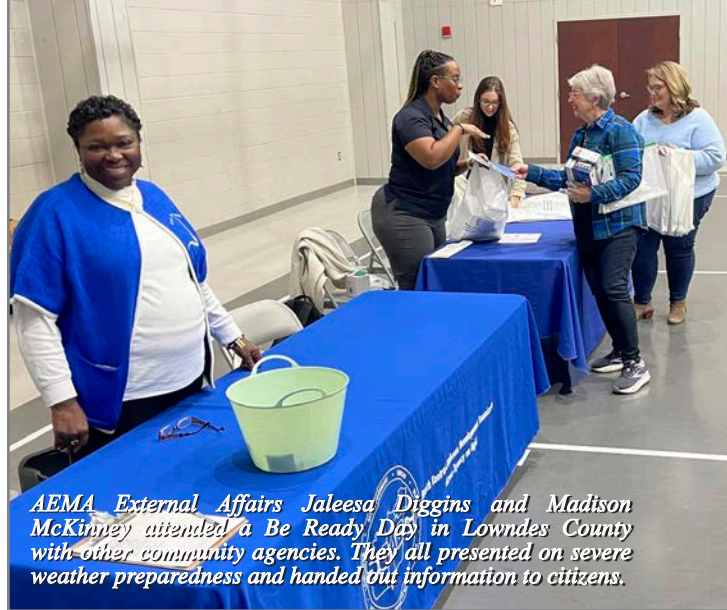
1. Work with the emergency managers to establish preparedness priorities and encourage leaders to coordinate their efforts with the local emergency management agencies.
2. Adopt and implement mitigation and climate strategies.
3. Encourage individuals, families and businesses to develop emergency plans to be self-sufficient immediately after a disaster.
4. Participate in emergency and disaster preparedness exercises to demonstrate support. The exercises and drills also help build familiarity with emergency management plans and staff.
5. Prepare for possible media interviews.
  - a. Build relationships with your Public Information Officers (PIO) to develop coordinated messaging.
6. Understand how essential private sector services and government continuity operate.

## Respond Effectively During a Disaster

1. Get informed quickly by staying in close contact with emergency managers.
2. Trust and empower emergency management officials.
  - a. This may include getting assistance from other agencies, the private sector, or neighboring jurisdictions, issuing emergency orders and assuring compliance.
3. Communicate quickly, clearly, and effectively to the whole community.

## Recover Efficiently After a Disaster

1. Identify opportunities to build more resilient communities.
  - a. Planning smart infrastructure investments, including mitigation projects that reduce risk from future events.
2. Understand the use of the available financial and in-kind assistance programs.
  - a. Programs are available post-disaster for community members and the government.



*AEMA External Affairs Jaleesa Diggins and Madison McKinney attended a Be Ready Day in Lowndes County with other community agencies. They all presented on severe weather preparedness and handed out information to citizens.*



*AEMA hosts yearly hurricane exercises with local, state and federal partners.*



*Pictured from left to right: Jessica Waters of Baldwin County EMA, Nicholas Glover and Rita Smith of Lee County EMA, and Jaleesa Diggins of AEMA. They visited Asheville, North Carolina for their Emergency Management Assistance Compact PIO mission during Hurricane Helene response efforts.*



3. Leverage the expertise and resources of various departments and partner organizations.
  - a. Include personnel with expertise in planning, community outreach, housing, public works, education systems, economic development, natural resources and public health.
4. Communicate clearly with community members.
  - a. Recovery can be complex. Instill trust and confidence in your community during this process.
5. Ensure all codes and regulations are enforced.
  - a. Develop disaster financial management processes and procedures before an incident.

Learn more at [fema.gov](https://www.fema.gov) or scan the QR code to access the Local Elected and Appointed Officials Quick Reference Guide.

Community organizations, schools and businesses can contact the AEMA External Affairs Office at (205) 280-2200 to learn more about PIO training and preparedness outreach or to tour our State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). The SEOC is located at 5841 County Road 41 Clanton, AL. ■



*AEMA and Baldwin County representatives attended a recent Alabama Resilience Summit in Foley, AL.*



*The Alabama Emergency Management Agency and State Emergency Operations Center is located in Clanton, AL.*



## Alabama's only state tax refund municipal debt recovery program

**(FREE to eligible participating members!)**

[www.alintercept.org](http://www.alintercept.org)

### Why use Municipal Intercept Services (MIS) when you already have a debt collection service?

**MIS is NOT a debt collection agency or service.** MIS does not do what debt collection services do and debt collection services cannot offer what MIS does. MIS is a unique way to attempt to recover money owed to your municipality by "intercepting" an individual's Alabama State tax refund. Debt collection agencies CANNOT offer you this service. MIS is a legislatively sanctioned conduit with the Alabama Department of Revenue (ADOR) that enables ADOR to recover delinquent debts owed by individuals to your municipality by collecting this debt from the individual's Alabama state tax refund. This system was made possible by an Alabama legislative change enacted in 2014 through which ADOR agreed to process these debts through only two clearinghouse organizations: the Alabama League of Municipalities (ALM) for municipal entities and the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA) for county entities. In 2015, ALM formed MIS to act as the clearinghouse on behalf of its municipal entities. **NOTE:** If the debtor is not eligible for an Alabama State tax refund, no money can be collected.

### Who is eligible to use the MIS system?

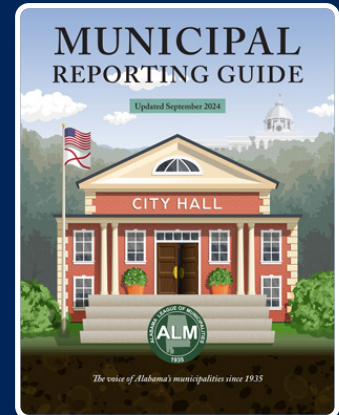
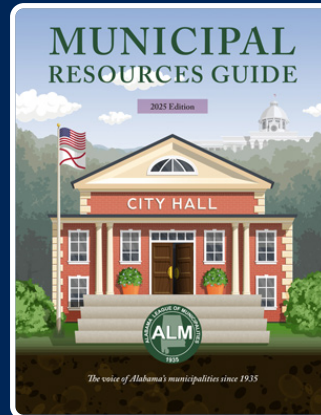
Only municipal entities within Alabama are eligible to use the MIS system. This includes cities, towns, certain utility boards, housing authorities and hospitals. **For more information, visit: [www.alintercept.org](http://www.alintercept.org).**



## The Alabama League of Municipalities has recently updated our **Municipal Resources Guide** and **Municipal Reporting Guide**!

As part of our mission to support our members, the League created these one-stop guides to ensure our municipalities are aware of various state resources they can apply for and laws that require local governments to provide annual reports on specific municipal operations. While these guides do not include all the information about each grant program and law, they do provide an overview of the requirements, contact information and deadlines. Please reach out to any member of our team at (334) 262-2566, if you need any assistance.

Both guides are living documents that will be updated each year. Members, legislators and other elected officials are encouraged to share these great resources. They can be accessed online at [almonline.org](http://almonline.org).



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# Meeting Your **STORMWATER RULES** with Citizen Science Water Monitors

Mona Dominguez • Acting Director, AU Water Resources Center • Director of Alabama Water Watch

**I**n recent years, the concept of citizen science has been gaining attention and popularity. You may have also heard it referred to as community science, participatory science or volunteer monitoring. Citizen science is the concept of involving the public with scientific research. Individuals are trained in scientific methods and can collect data that can be useful for larger projects. However, you may not have realized that citizen science water monitors can also help municipalities meet their municipal stormwater requirements.

## **Stormwater and MS4 Permits**

When it rains, water washes over the landscape and eventually flows into nearby streams, rivers or lakes. Urban areas have Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) to help move stormwater runoff away from infrastructure and into local waterways. Through storm drain inlets, runoff enters underground pipes that release mostly rainwater collected into local streams. While attempting to remove water quickly and efficiently, our stormwater systems also introduce potential pollutants to enter our waterways. In urban areas, asphalt, concrete and buildings increase the amount and flow of water runoff entering local streams. Increased runoff also makes flooding a greater risk. Runoff can carry excess sediment to muddy streams, introduce toxic substances to harm aquatic health, or carry excess fertilizers that cause algal blooms or human and animal waste that impact the health of humans recreating in the waterways.

Many people have the misconception that cities treat stormwater, which can lead them to take actions that further increase pollution via stormwater (e.g., dumping toxic materials, allowing lawn clippings, pet waste or excess fertilizer to enter storm drains).

## **The Role of Citizen Science**

The Clean Water Act requires cities with populations over 50,000 to acquire Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits and take efforts to minimize the amount of pollutants entering local waterways from the storm sewer system. The development and implementation of a stormwater management plan is part of the permit requirement. MS4 plans must address Minimum Control Measures that contribute to effective stormwater management (listed below).

There is an opportunity to utilize citizen science water monitoring to address each of these measures. Many Alabama cities, including Foley, Auburn, Opelika, Fairhope and Jefferson County, have partnered with the citizen science group Alabama Water Watch (AWW) to accomplish their stormwater goals.

Alabama Water Watch is a statewide citizen science program based in the Auburn University Water Resources Center. AWW trains individuals on how to monitor streams, rivers, lakes, and coastal areas in Alabama to track changes in water quality. Since 1992, AWW has been educating citizens about water quality issues, training volunteers to collect credible water chemistry, bacteriological, and biological water data, and empowering communities to utilize knowledge, skills, and data to improve local water quality.

Many forward-thinking municipalities include citizen science in their stormwater management strategy. Examples of how AWW can be included in MS4 initiatives include: Working with municipalities to target locations of pollutant concern for consistent water testing, creating a consistent water testing plan, and establishing strategic sampling sites. By working with Alabama Water Watch volunteers, cities can make their resources go further by developing a monitoring and educational outreach plan with citizen scientists.

## **How Citizen Science Can Meet MS4 Minimum Control Measures**

### **❶ Public Education and Outreach**

Municipalities must provide educational material about stormwater to residential, industrial, commercial and construction audiences. AWW water monitoring training increases understanding of water pollution, water quality standards and best management practices, helping meet MS4 requirements.



## 2 Public Participation and Involvement

Municipalities must allow the public to participate in the development of the stormwater management program. When stormwater managers engage with citizens through AWW, they can speak the same water monitoring language. Volunteers and stormwater managers have the shared goal of keeping our waterways healthy and developing an effective plan.

## 3 Illicit Discharge Detection

By partnering with AWW volunteer monitors, municipalities can receive a “first alert” for illicit discharge detection and other water quality issues. They can draw on their experience and make reports that include valuable details and even data, which will help a stormwater manager pinpoint the source of pollution.

## 4 Good Housekeeping

During trainings, volunteers not only learn about causes of pollution and how monitoring can detect water quality issues, but how those issues can be prevented by implementing best management practices.



*The city of Orange Beach's Wind and Water Learning Center learning coordinator teaches local citizens to conduct water monitoring. Photo credit: Sydney Zinner*



*A volunteer counts *E. coli* colonies to determine results of bacteriological monitoring. Photo credit: Mona Dominguez*

*Alabama Water Watch conducting bacteriological monitoring on Parkerson Mill Creek that runs through AU's campus. Photo credit: Carolina Ruiz*



*Auburn University and Auburn city stormwater managers work together to address a local water quality issue. Photo credit: Dustin Rogers*





## 5 Construction Site Runoff

Volunteers are familiar with the threat construction site runoff can pose to water quality, especially turbidity. They can help document sites that need attention by taking photos, collecting downstream water quality data, and communicating issues to stormwater managers.

### CASE STUDY:

#### How Auburn University Works with Alabama Water Watch on Its MS4 Permit

Auburn University falls under MS4 permit requirements. AU Risk Management and Safety (RMS) leads this effort and works with AWW to identify target locations of pollutant concern across campus, create a consistent testing plan, and establish strategic sampling sites. AWW water monitors collect bacteria data from around 13 sites on campus each month. AWW's fast testing can provide results for bacteria within 24 hours, allowing Auburn University to then investigate sites quickly with high bacteria levels. This 'first alert' allows AU Risk Management and Safety to investigate the potential cause further, and when possible, take action. By working with AWW, Auburn can test more frequently with faster feedback loops, making corrective action easier.

This process is often messy and takes time, as issues in MS4 systems are often varied and difficult to detect. Overall, however, it is effective. This project has yielded over 500 data records, helping prevent chronic, undetected pollution in the watershed. Cost estimates show that it would cost over \$190,000 to conduct the same amount of data collection through a professional lab. Often, water quality issues cross campus boundaries, and it is necessary to involve the city of Auburn. Much of this project's success can be credited to the good working relationship between AWW, RMS and the city of Auburn.

In addition to providing water testing, the AWW team works to address problems and meet MS4 Minimum Control Measures. The group helps conduct education and outreach events that help meet the "Public Education and Outreach" minimum control measure requirement.

Citizen science programs like AWW prepare community members to become advocates of effective stormwater management. Volunteer monitors are cost effective extra eyes, ears and noses on the ground who alert stormwater managers of potential pollution issues. However, cities must respect citizen scientists and ensure that volunteers also benefit from being involved. It can be helpful to show appreciation to volunteers by responding to citizen concerns and offering periodic feedback regarding the data they have collected.

### Connect with AWW to Learn More

Whether your city is required to meet MS4 requirements or not, please consider the inclusion of citizen science with AWW as you work to protect your community and its water resources. Visit [alabamawaterwatch.org](http://alabamawaterwatch.org) to learn more or contact the AWW Office at [awwprog@auburn.edu](mailto:awwprog@auburn.edu) or (334) 844-4785. ■



*In addition to overseeing the operations of AWW, Mona Dominguez develops training materials, facilitates workshops, and seeks out opportunities for collaboration and growth. She also works internationally with the Global Water Watch Program to develop and implement community-based water monitoring programs.*



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# RECOVERING FROM STORMS:

## TIPS FROM ALABAMA POWER TO MUNICIPALITIES

KATIE BOLTEN • STRATEGIC ISSUES MANAGER • ALABAMA POWER

**I**n 2025, Alabama has faced numerous severe weather events, ranging from ice and snow to tornadoes. When storms hit, the aftermath can be challenging. With the right preparation and response, communities can recover more effectively.

Alabama Power is committed to restoring power swiftly and safely, and we want to share our knowledge to help our community partners in their recovery efforts.

### OUR RESPONSE AND TECHNOLOGY:

Alabama Power operates one of the most advanced power grids in the nation, equipped with technology designed to prevent and quickly resolve outages. When a storm hits, we adopt an all-hands-on-deck approach, deploying additional resources as needed. Thanks to our advanced technology and skilled team, over 70% of outages are typically resolved in under two hours. During a March storm, our outage prevention technology saved nearly 30,000 customers from prolonged outages.

### INVESTMENTS FOR RELIABILITY:

We continually invest in strategic undergrounding, fiber networks and smart meters to enhance reliability and reduce the frequency and duration of outages. Our team is on call 24/7 365 days a year, maintaining an over 90% call-out rate to ensure reliable power during severe weather.

### GRANTS TO ENHANCE:

The Alabama Power Foundation offers Good Roots and Gateway grants to help replant trees and greenery in storm-hit areas. These grants can play a vital role in restoring the natural beauty and environmental health of affected communities. To learn more and apply, visit [powerofgood.com](http://powerofgood.com) by scanning the QR code on the left.

When storms are forecasted, we encourage customers to be prepared and informed. Scan the QR code on the right to visit [alabamapower.com/storm](http://alabamapower.com/storm) for safety tips and outage information. By working together and staying prepared, we can ensure a quicker and safer recovery for our communities.



Alabama Power  
Grants



Safety Tips/  
Outage Information



## TIPS FOR STORM RECOVERY:

To assist our community partners in recovering from severe weather, we offer the following tips:

### **ASSESS AND DOCUMENT DAMAGE:**

- Conduct a thorough assessment of your community. Document damage with photos and detailed notes. This information will be crucial for insurance claims and federal assistance.

### **COMMUNICATE WITH RESIDENTS:**

- Keep residents informed about recovery efforts through social media, websites and local news. Provide updates on power restoration, safety tips and available resources.

### **COORDINATE WITH EMERGENCY SERVICES:**

- Work closely with local emergency services to ensure a coordinated response. Share information and resources to expedite recovery efforts.

### **ENSURE SAFETY:**

- Prioritize safety during recovery. Warn residents to stay away from downed power lines and flooded areas. Make sure your team is equipped with proper safety gear.

### **PROVIDE SUPPORT TO VULNERABLE POPULATIONS:**

- Identify and assist vulnerable populations, including the elderly and those with medical needs. Ensure they have access to necessary resources and support.

### **DEBRIS REMOVAL:**

- Organize debris removal efforts. Clear roads and public spaces to facilitate recovery work and ensure safety. Again, avoid downed power lines and call Alabama Power if you see any.

### **REVIEW AND UPDATE EMERGENCY PLANS:**

- After the recovery, review and update your emergency plans based on lessons learned. This will help improve your response to future storms.

Remember, preparation and swift action are key to effective storm recovery. The more you do now, the better we can handle the aftermath of any storm. Let us work together to keep our communities safe and resilient. ■



*Alabama Power Company crews work around the clock after disasters to restore power to affected communities.*





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