

Summer 2025 Volume 83, Issue 1

The Alabama MUNICIPAL Journal

Official publication of the Alabama League of Municipalities

Alabama's Local Waterways and Ecotourism

Alabama communities are creatively using local waterways to bring in recreation and tourism. Thinking ahead about protecting local waterways may be in your communities' best interest.

See page 36.



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About ALM:

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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In this Issue:

Executive Director's Report	5	Service and Support: How Alabama is Taking Care of its Veterans Every Day	33
Leadership Perspective	7-10	Making Your Local Waterways a Community Asset	36
Legal Viewpoint:		Alabama's Wellness Revolution: How Cities are Transforming Public Spaces with Fitness Courts	41
Responding to Public Records Requests: A Review of a Process that is Still Relatively New	11	Schedule Proactive Driver Training for Your Municipal Employees	46
EDA Spotlight: Q&A with Luverne Councilmember Kathryn Smith on EDA Experience	14	Request the Firearms Training System Today	47
ACE Spotlight: Millbrook's Recreational Investments Score Major Economic Opportunities for Region	18	You're Invited to Participate in City Hall Selfie Day on August 12, 2025!	49
Review of the 2025 Legislative Session	23	ALM Honors Sam Gaston with 2025 Hometown Hero Award	50
New NLC Senior Regional Specialist Highlights Value of NLC Membership	28	ALM Expands Positions and Welcomes New Team Members ...	53
NLC City Summit, November 20-22, Salt Lake City	31	2025 Fall Municipal Law Conference	54
2025 Regional Orientation Training	32		



On the Cover:

Kayakers enjoy a tour along The Coastal Alabama Back Bay Blueway. Photo courtesy of Auburn University Water Resources Center.

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Executive Director's Second Quarter Report

Gregory D. Cochran • Executive Director

We have had an incredible summer with conferences across America to meet with and discuss issues impacting municipal governance. We kicked off the summer with the ALM Annual Convention in Huntsville where we celebrated our 90th anniversary! Thanks to our communications team, Lori Johns and Karl Franklin, we created some extra buzz this year with outstanding graphics and visuals that showcased the incredible history of ALM and the legacy left by its past leadership. We appreciate the more than 800 municipal officials that took the time to attend our convention!

Once the convention ended, we quickly transitioned to Las Vegas to participate in the largest retail conference in America, the International Conference of Shopping Centers (ICSC). ALM collaborated with the Economic Development Association of Alabama (EDAA) on sponsoring the Alabama night reception and hosted a 20' x 20' booth in the conference's exhibition hall to allow our municipal officials to meet with and discuss why private developers and retailers should consider their community to expand their economic investments. Bryan Parker, ALM Economic Development Academy specialist, did an outstanding job of coordinating partners and local officials to maximize their time at the conference.

Following the ICSC conference - immediate past president, Mayor Mark Saliba of Dothan, Kayla Bass and I traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with our counterparts, congressional leadership and members of President Donald Trump's White House Intergovernmental Affairs team to discuss how we can partner in the delivery of social services, public safety and infrastructure investment.

Following D.C., Sean Duke, Richard Buttenshaw, Barry Crabb, several employees of the Loss Control department and I attended the Public Risk Management Association Conference with members of the AMIC and MWCF boards. This conference focused on the best practices in the administration of insurance and workers' compensation and had several speakers discuss the current market challenges, such as reinsurance, lawsuit exposure and administrative efficiencies.

Additionally, the ALM legal team is busy providing information and providing answers from our officials and clerks on the upcoming municipal elections. Election years are always the most challenging on our organization. We are saddened by the retirement of several members of the executive committee which includes: Councilmember Sadie Britt of Lincoln, Mayor Lew Watson of Lincoln, Mayor Howard Rubenstein of Saraland and Mayor Gary Fuller of Opelika. Each served as presidents of ALM and have provided our organization with leadership and integrity.

Should you need any information on the upcoming municipal elections – please do not hesitate to contact a member of our legal team at 334-262-2566.

We thank all our officials and their sacrifices in serving their community and our organization. It is your commitment and energy that drives us to work hard in providing you with the best in services and resources to effectively build vibrant



communities. To those that have chosen to retire, we hope you will remain in touch and enjoy the next chapter of your life.

To close out the year, this fall ALM will host four regional orientation trainings across Alabama for newly elected and veteran officials. The purpose is to provide essential training on the roles of the mayor and councilmember, financial sustainability, ethics and best practices in municipal governance. This will provide each attendee with 10 hours of Certified Municipal Official training hours.

The workshops will be held in Tuscaloosa on October 1-2; Montgomery on October 29-30; Huntsville on November 5-6; and Daphne on November 12-13. To register, please visit www.almonline.org. Also, be sure to help us spread the word on the importance of your newly elected official's attendance at one of these workshops to get them started on the right foot.

Lastly, we will host our standing committee and legislative committee meetings on September 3 in Montgomery. Again, thank you for your partnership and leadership in ALM! ■

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



Several communities utilized ALM's booth to engage with economic development prospects at ICSC in Las Vegas, NV in May.

2025 Elections Reporting Notice

Agency Reported To: Judge of probate; Secretary of State; and the Alabama League of Municipalities

Report Due Date: Within 10 days of canvassing the results

Who is Required to Report: All municipalities

Summary of Reporting Requirements: Certificate of Election for each candidate elected. Code Section: Section 11-46-55, Code of Alabama 1975.

Campaign Finance Reporting Changes: In the past, municipal candidates were required to file campaign finance forms with the probate judge within five days of qualifying with the city clerk, regardless of whether they raised or spent any money. Beginning June 1, 2024, municipal candidates are not required to file an Appointment of Principal Campaign Committee or any monthly, weekly or daily campaign disclosure reports after they qualify with their city clerk, unless and until they raise or spend in excess of \$1,000. If a municipal candidate raises or spends over \$1,000, he or she must file electronically with the Alabama secretary of state at FCPA.AlabamaVotes.gov. For more information, please read Act 2024-104.

Along with the Certificate of Election, please send the newly elected official's name, title and email address to Annabel before taking office in November. A personal email would be best but definitely one they can easily access. Once an official city email address is created, we can add that later.

Reporting Agency Contact Information:

Municipality's County Probate Judge

(Will vary depending on the municipality)

Secretary of State

Jeff Elrod

Elections Division Director of Elections

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P.O. Box 1270

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Leadership Perspective

Mayor Sherry Sullivan • Fairhope • ALM President



One-On-One with President Sherry Sullivan

What made you run for mayor?

I had always considered the idea of running for mayor but was not sure if I would ever take that step. In 2020, with the encouragement and support of my community, I made the decision to run.

For me, it was not just about the common desire to give back—it was deeper than that. I ran because I believed Fairhope needed someone committed to restoring civility in our community; investing in the city's greatest asset—our employees; rebuilding aging infrastructure; and enhancing our parks and public spaces.

I believed our city needed leadership that puts community over self, sets aside personal agendas and focuses on what is truly best for Fairhope. I knew it would be hard work, but I was ready to roll up my sleeves and get it done.

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

This is my first term as mayor. Before becoming mayor, I worked for the city of Fairhope for almost 17 years and then worked for a telecom company, Point Broadband, and for Riviera Utilities as director of governmental affairs and economic development.

Why did you run for president of ALM, and what are your goals for this year?

I have always loved being part of a team—and to me, that is exactly what the Alabama League of Municipalities represents. We are a team of elected officials united by a common purpose to improve the daily lives of our citizens. We work together to protect the powers and revenues of local government and to advocate on behalf of the communities we serve and the other communities who are part of ALM. It is a shared mission built on collaboration, commitment and responsibility to those we serve.

What have your first few months as president been like?

I had the advantage of serving as vice president of the League last year, so that has helped me get acclimated to the schedule, the staff and the leaders of ALM. We have hit the ground running with meetings, organizing orientation trainings and setting goals for the upcoming year.



Daphne Mayor Robin LeJeune, Fairhope Mayor Sherry Sullivan and Spanish Fort Mayor Mike McMillan are three of the mayors that make up the Baldwin County Mayors Association.



Meteorologist James Spann, in the center, spoke at a hurricane preparedness event in Fairhope to kick off hurricane season.

What have you learned from being in the CMO program, and what level have you obtained?

One of the most valuable programs offered by ALM is the Certified Municipal Official (CMO) program. When you decide to run for elected office, there is no formal test to take or license to earn—yet, the responsibilities are significant. The CMO program fills that gap by providing critical education and training on essential topics such as the bid law, the Open Meetings Act, planning and zoning, economic development and the respective roles of the council and mayor.

ALM and the CMO program are truly among the greatest resources available to both newly elected and veteran municipal officials. I am proud to have earned my advanced certification and look forward to achieving emeritus status in the coming years. I strongly encourage all municipal officials to take full advantage of not only the required training, but also the many programs and opportunities the League offers.

What other leadership roles have you had or programs have you participated in with the League? What were those experiences like?

Since 2000, I have attended many League and NLC events. Over the past couple of years, I have had the privilege of serving on the Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation board and the legislative committee prior to being elected as vice president.

One thing that truly makes it easy to serve the League is the incredible staff. They handle so much behind the scenes that any role in leadership becomes not only manageable but a pleasure. Their dedication and support make all the difference.

What do you like most about your city?

For me, Fairhope is synonymous with home—that is what I love most about it. It is where most of my family lives and where all of my favorite places can be found including: the bluffs overlooking the bay, the flower filled downtown and the parks. There is truly nothing like watching a sunset from Henry George Park or taking a stroll along the bay at sunset.

Fairhope is the place I call home; not just because of its beauty, but because of its people. The community here is kind, caring and genuinely engaged. It is the people of Fairhope who make it so special. Their spirit is what makes Fairhope feel like home.



State and local officials attended the opening of Baldwin County's first Safe Haven Baby Box, which is located at Daphne Fire Station #5.



In June, the city of Fairhope held a kickoff ceremony for the creation of Hatch Fairhope in the former historic K-1 Center school building.

What kind of short-term and long-term projects are you working on in Fairhope?

We have several projects happening in Fairhope that will be legacy projects and projects that I am so proud to be part of.

Flying Creek Nature Preserve Overview

The Flying Creek Nature Preserve is a 108-acre wooded sanctuary located along Fly Creek in Fairhope. True to the city's founding vision of reserving exceptional land for public benefit, this preserve offers a peaceful escape into nature, featuring a rich forest and ecosystem. Designed to support passive recreation and environmental education, the preserve will be developed with minimal impact to the existing native habitat.

Phase I, just opened in July, includes:

- John Martin Nature Center
- Multi-use nature trails
- Outdoor classrooms
- Informational trailhead kiosk
- Bicycle repair station
- Restroom pavilion
- Low-impact development (LID) parking area

A 7-acre section will be restored as a longleaf pine forest, enhancing biodiversity and providing a critical wildlife habitat. A pedestrian underpass beneath Veteran's Drive will connect both parcels of the property, which will eventually all be developed for recreational purposes.

Fairhope K-1 Center – Hatch Fairhope

The second major initiative is the renovation of the historic Fairhope K-1 Center into a cutting-edge tech incubator—Hatch Fairhope. This pioneering hub is the result of a dynamic partnership between the city of Fairhope and the Baldwin Community and Economic Development Foundation. Designed to support tech-driven entrepreneurs across Fairhope and Baldwin County, Hatch Fairhope provides a vibrant platform for both early-stage startups and established businesses to grow and thrive.

By restoring this beloved building, we are not only preserving a vital piece of Fairhope's history, but also reimagining it as a center for innovation and opportunity. The Fairhope K-1 Center will once again be a place of learning—equipped with the tools, resources and collaborative environment that today's entrepreneurs need to succeed.

Both projects are being funded in whole or partially with grants from the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, Innovate Alabama, the state of Alabama and the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

As one of the fastest growing cities in the state, what are some of the things that you/Fairhope do to connect with other leaders in the region?

In any leadership position, building relationships is essential and being mayor is no different. I am actively involved in the Baldwin County Mayors Association, which meets regularly, and I frequently communicate with fellow mayors, business leaders and elected officials throughout our region. Being part of the Alabama League of Municipalities is another valuable way to stay engaged with leaders across the state. No matter the challenge, idea or situation, chances are someone has already faced it. These relationships give me access to a wealth of knowledge and experience that help me better serve my community.

What did you take away from this year's legislative session?

If there is one thing you can say about this past legislative session, it is that it was busy. They seemed to be working at warp speed. While the legislature continues to do great work on behalf of our state, they are also advancing bills that can significantly impact local governments.

I truly appreciate their commitment to tax cuts; however, it does create added pressure on local governments to follow suit. Unfortunately, we do not always have the revenue to absorb the resulting budget shortfalls. Every dollar we receive is critical to delivering the infrastructure, public safety and quality-of-life projects our citizens expect.

I am especially grateful to our advocacy team for being our eyes and ears at the state house. Their hard work and advocacy on our behalf make a real difference. ■

Leadership Perspective

Mayor Rusty Jessup • Riverside • ALM Vice President



On the afternoon of May 15, 2025, a joyful noise echoed from the Von Braun Center in Huntsville, Alabama. That sound? A very enthusiastic “WOOHOO!” from yours truly, small-town Mayor Rusty Jessup, when I was elected vice president of the Alabama League of Municipalities — the first ever from St. Clair County!

What an incredible honor — not just for me, but for the entire Riverside community and all of St. Clair County. I even got a congratulatory call from the president of Jacksonville State University, my alma mater! I am deeply grateful and humbled. Thank you all — it truly means the world.

If you are reading this publication for the first time after the recent municipal elections, welcome and congratulations! My advice? Dive in headfirst. The Alabama League of Municipalities is more than an organization — it is a family. It will make you a better elected official, leader and person. You will find yourself surrounded by folks who understand exactly what you are going through, because they have been there too.

I began my journey with ALM in 2004 when I was first elected to our city council. While the training sessions are valuable, what has kept me coming back year after year is YOU — the members. The friendships I have made stretch from the Tennessee line to the Gulf Coast, and I would not trade them for anything.

This year, I have one simple goal; I want to come see you. I want to visit your city hall; grab lunch at your favorite local spot; meet your city employees; and attend your council meetings. I want to shake hands with the folks who trusted you with their vote. We can talk shop — planning, zoning, public safety — or just talk football. If you have made it this far into the article, give me a call or email me at mayor@riverside-al.com and we can get it on the calendar. I double-dog dare ya!

President Sherry Sullivan and I are committed to making this year meaningful and fun. We want ALM to be more than a resource, we want it to be a support system. Because the reality is, public service can feel lonely, but you are not alone. We have been there. We get it and we are here to lift each other up.

So, embrace the League, get involved and let us make this year one to remember together. ■



Mayor Jessup showcases his alma mater pride!



Mayor Jessup is pictured with members of the current city council. Left to right: Councilmember Dan Cain, Councilmember Sam Maddox and Mayor Pro Tem Jimmy Hollander.

LEGAL VIEWPOINT

By Rob Johnston, Director of Legal Services, ALM

Responding to Public Records Requests: A Review of a Process that is Still Relatively New

One of the most challenging public policy issues for municipalities is the juggling act between access to public records, confidential and privileged records, personal privacy, and limited personnel and resources in local government administration. Alabama's public records laws provide rules to give Alabama residents access to government records. The purpose of these public records laws is for transparency and accountability on every level of government in Alabama, including Alabama municipalities.

Over the years, the Alabama Legislature has revisited Alabama's public records laws and made changes to them. In 2024, the Legislature passed an act creating a process that requires specific response times municipalities must follow in response to public requests. With that in mind, this article focuses on these response requirements as a refresher in practicing this relatively new law.

What is the Procedure for Responding to Public Records Requests?

In 2024, changes were made to Alabama's public records law. Act 2024-278 enacted a procedure for municipal clerks, the custodian of municipal records, to follow when responding to public records requests. This procedure is primarily codified in sections 36-12-43 through 46 of the Alabama Code. The primary intent is to provide deadlines for responding to public records requests depending on the substance of the request.

Understanding the Difference Between a Standard Request Versus a Time-Intensive Request

The act categorizes requests into two different types of requests: a standard request and time-intensive request. First, the act defines a standard request as any request that will take less than eight hours to process and fulfill. A time-intensive request is defined as any request that will take more than eight hours to process and fulfill. Section 36-12-43(b) Code of Alabama 1975.

Required Response Time for Standard Requests

Generally, the same rules apply to each type of request. The primary difference is the required time to respond. For standard requests, the municipality has 10 business days from the receipt of the request to provide an acknowledgement of receipt to the requestor. The act does not specify the form in which the acknowledgment must be provided. Once a standard request has been acknowledged, the municipality has 15 business days to provide a substantive response to the requestor.

A substantive response can take many forms such as providing the documents with or without certain contingencies or denying the request for a recognized reason. For example, a substantive response can be a statement that the city is prepared to provide the requested public records to the requester upon payment of a reasonable fee or that the request is denied because the documents sought do not exist or are confidential and not subject to public disclosure. The form of the substantive response will be highly dependent on the substance of the request and circumstances surrounding the request.



For standard requests, the city can extend the time to respond in 15-business day increments upon proper notice to the requestor. This does not mean the request can be extended in perpetuity. After the earlier of 30 business days or 60 calendar days following either the city’s acknowledgement of the request or the payment of the estimated fees, a rebuttable presumption that the request has been denied is triggered. Generally, once a request is considered denied the requestor can file a lawsuit challenging the legitimacy of the denial. Section 36-12-44, Code of Alabama 1975.

Required Response Time for Time-Intensive Requests

Like standard requests, for time-intensive requests a municipality has 10 days from the receipt of the request to provide an acknowledgement to the requester that the request has been received. After acknowledgment a municipality has 15 business days to notify the requestor that the request has been classified as a time-intensive request. If the requester elects to proceed with a time-intensive request, a municipality has 45 business days to provide a substantive response to the requestor.

For time-intensive requests, the city can extend the time to respond in 45-business day increments upon proper notice to the requestor. However, after the earlier of 180 business days or 270 calendar days following the requester’s election to proceed with a time-intensive request, a rebuttable presumption that the request has been denied is triggered. Section 36-12-44, Code of Alabama 1975.

The act also provides that the rebuttable presumption of denial is not triggered for both types of requests in the following scenarios:

- The request is not proper or the public officer is not obligated or required to respond;
 - The public officer has responded in part;
 - The public officer and requester have reached an agreement regarding the time or substance, or both, of the response;
 - Negotiations are ongoing between the public officer and the requester;
 - The public officer has reasonably communicated the status of the request to the requester.
- Section 36-12-44, Code of Alabama 1975.

The municipality also may require the requester to pay a reasonable fee before providing a substantive response to the requester.

The municipality is required to maintain a log for keeping track of currently pending time-intensive requests. For each

such currently pending request, the log shall identify the name of the requester and the date of acknowledgment. The log shall be a confidential document that is not subject to a public records request. Section 36-12-44, Code of Alabama 1975.

Other Notables

Written procedures are provided for responding to public records requests that will apply if written procedures are not already adopted by the municipality. These written procedures also contain a sample standard request form that may be adopted. In addition, the act authorizes cities not to respond to a public records request that is not made pursuant to the municipality’s written procedures. Section 36-12-45, Code of Alabama 1975.

The act did not modify the definition of a public record despite the act changing the term “public writing” to “public record.” However, the Alabama Supreme Court has determined that the term “public writing” is synonymous with the term “public record.” *See Health Care Auth. for Baptist Health v. Cent. Alabama Radiation Oncology, LLC*, 292 So. 3d 623, 628 (Ala. 2019). Therefore, prior attorney general opinions and Alabama Supreme Court decisions interpreting the term public writing are still applicable.

The act also clarifies that a municipality is not required to create a new public record that did not previously exist to respond to a records request. Also, the act provides that a request can be denied for being vague, ambiguous, overly broad, or unreasonable in scope. Section 36-12-44, Code of Alabama 1975. Finally, the bill provides permissible written procedures municipalities can adopt to help facilitate the new public record request requirements. Section 36-12-45, Code of Alabama 1975.



Conclusion

As custodian of municipal records, your municipal clerk is responsible for following this new public records request process. For more information on Alabama’s public records laws, please refer to the League’s Public Records Selected Reading article on our website by scanning the QR code. If you have further questions regarding the new time requirements in fulfilling public records requests from the 2024 law or any other question regarding public records, please do not hesitate to contact the League’s legal department at (334) 262-2566 or via our website at www.almonline.org. ■



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EDA Spotlight: Q&A with Luverne Councilmember Kathryn Smyth on Economic Development Academy Experience

Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM



Four years ago, the Alabama League of Municipalities, in partnership with the Alabama Community College System, launched the Economic Development Academy (EDA) to educate and engage municipal officials on the essential elements and phases of economic development while highlighting their vital role in economic initiatives and projects within their communities. The EDA engages elected officials from participating cities and towns with municipal peers from their region to prepare their communities for growth. Up to seven people can participate per community including mayors, councilmembers, city administrators, city clerks, economic developers, business leaders and more.

Using a collaborative municipal team approach, participants convene four times throughout the year to complete assignments and develop strategies to enhance their economic development efforts. Ultimately, each municipality selected is required to implement a community project and to report on its progress. The League has had a total of 45 communities to graduate from the program.

This quarter, we are excited to spotlight the city of Luverne for their participation in the second EDA class in 2023. The city of Luverne was established in 1889. It has approximately 2,800 residents and serves as the county seat of Crenshaw County in south Alabama. Councilmember Kathryn Smyth has served on the city council for nine years and says that Luverne is known for being the “Friendliest City in the South,” having a Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company plant and being the home of Sister Schubert’s homemade rolls.

In addition to Councilmember Smyth, the Luverne EDA committee consisted of Robyn Snellgrove, Crenshaw County economic and industrial development director; Betty Dawson, councilmember; Samantha Bagwell, banker; and Stallion Sasser, county commissioner. Councilmember Smyth shared that it was helpful to have a cross section of EDA committee members to take the knowledge they learned in the class back to their respective bases while also helping them to better understand each other’s perspectives.

Let us take a deeper look into her EDA experience through a series of questions and answers.

How does your current/previous job impact your decision making as a municipal leader?

Prior to serving on the council, I was a victims advocate with the district attorney’s office and executive director of the Safe Harbor Butler County Children’s Advocacy Center for 20 years for the 2nd Judicial Circuit, covering Crenshaw, Butler and Lowndes counties. My previous career continues to help me connect with the needs of children and families in many ways. I am still called to provide support and resources, which I am happy to do. I currently serve as a rural workforce coordinator with Southeast Alabama Works, which provides opportunities with business and industry, job training, certifications and monitoring local workforce needs. One of my favorite aspects of this job is to work with area



high school students on soft skills, professional development, interview and resume building and etiquette. Preparing them for the workforce is our highest priority.

Why did you and your colleagues apply to EDA?

We applied in order to gain a broader understanding of economic development and how it can benefit smaller cities. We needed to learn about incentives and what businesses are looking for when searching for a new location.

What did your community economic vitality survey reveal?

The survey was worth its weight in gold for us! Our charm factors were easily stated but reviewed as assets in a fresh way. The most interesting information came from the data on commuting patterns into and out of our municipality. It was very eye opening. It also renewed our attention to retail needs such as recruiting a menswear store, a shoe store, a full service drug store and a dry cleaners. Our number one priority is to maintain our rural hospital, which thankfully we are holding on to for the time being.

What did your approved project/program consist of?

It primarily focused on updating wayfinding signage that weather and time may have damaged. We have designed entry and exit signs to replace the aging signage that we currently have, and we have grant funding in place for payment.

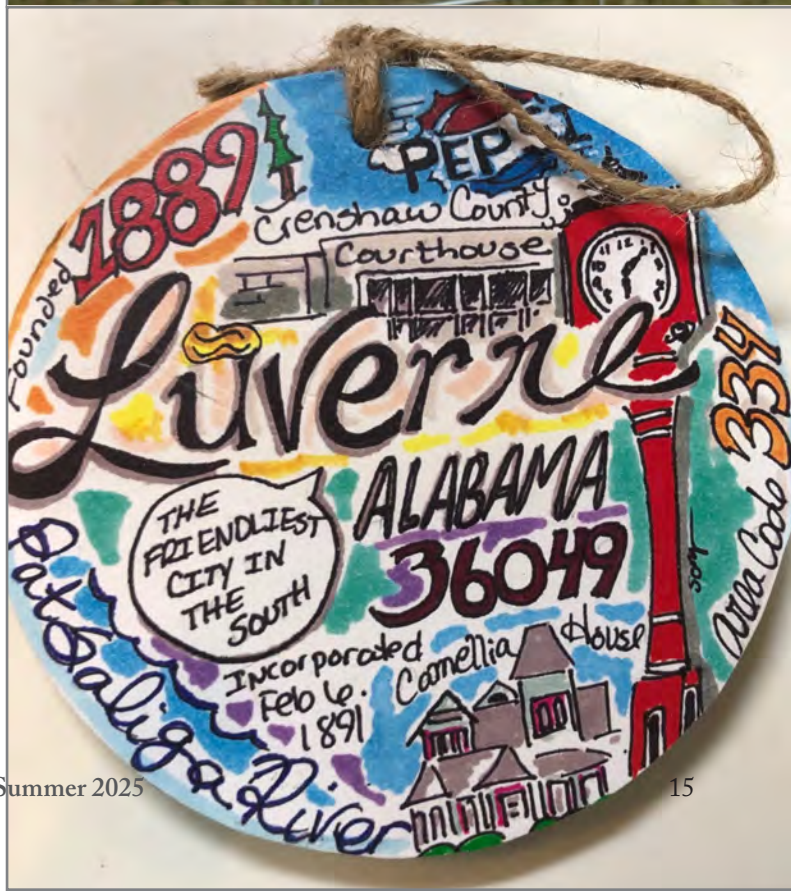
How has EDA impacted your decision-making process for the city when it comes to recruiting new businesses and retaining old ones?

We are more educated in common practices and how to make us more marketable to interested business and industry, start-up entrepreneurs and retail prospects. We understand that we need to be shovel ready for newly interested investors. We are able to plan better by asking ourselves is our infrastructure adequate; do we have the workforce capacity; and do we have an appropriate site immediately available to meet their needs. Finding the YES to these questions is our goal!

Top: Councilmember Kathryn Smyth loves to show visitors their "Welcome to Luverne" mural. She is pictured here with her friend Vicki Vaughan Collins from San Diego, CA.

Middle: Sister Schubert's is a staple in this Wiregrass community.

Bottom: Luverne's art scene often pays homage to their unique history.





Clockwise from top left:

Luverne High School cheerleaders participate in the annual Christmas parade.

Repurposed car tags are one of many unique finds one can discover at ReImagined, a shop along U.S. Highway 331.

The city added Boo in the Lu signage to their Halloween festivities last year.

City workers work hard each season to decorate their community for events like Treats on Us.

Crenshaw Christian Academy cheerleaders perform in the heart of downtown Luverne.

The Friendliest City Festival brings together citizens in Luverne each fall at Douglass Park.



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

Our joint efforts, especially thanks to the leadership and experience of our economic development director, helped retain our more than 100-year-old Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company plant with a relocation and expansion. The new 75,000-square-foot facility almost doubles the old one and has 13 more loading docks. This year's move allows us to retain 79 jobs and create 10 more.

Additionally, we have continued to focus on downtown revitalization efforts and reviewing planning commission requirements. We have added festival lights and benches to Douglass Park, our downtown park, and are increasing electrical capacity for seasonal events. We are making improvements and upgrades to Turner Park by way of updating our tennis court, adding pickleball courts and improving the surface of the basketball court.

We are also adding a splash pad there this summer as part of our increased focus on quality of life in our city.

Furthermore, we have several infrastructure projects being completed with new water, sewer and gas lines and then new paving on several roads.

Lastly, we are currently seeking funding for our comprehensive plan in order to complete our commitment to the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program.



What did you enjoy the most about the EDA?

I enjoyed the resources that were shared and the small group setting with other small cities our size. It was helpful to hear each other's success stories and tried and failed experiences.

What were some of the main skills that you learned or topics that you were able to get help with?

We focused on the need to be shovel ready instead of a slow response for interested business and industry. We benefitted from stories of other presenters that shared what they looked for – cities that showed pride and effort in their upkeep of streets and parks among other things. The workforce sessions stressed the importance of having a ready-to-work population that had strong soft skills and certifications in areas of local industry needs.

What advice do you have for cities that are interested in applying?

We would highly recommend cities of any size, but especially smaller rural towns to apply. There are statewide resources offered through this program that are not available just anywhere.

What are your city's future plans when it comes to economic development?

We will use our experience to retain the industries that we have here, to serve their needs in the best way possible and to encourage new businesses to bring quality jobs to our area.

Did EDA meet or exceed your expectations?

I cannot stress enough how well Bryan Parker and Neal Wade recruited us and walked us through the process. They have been invaluable still to this day for guidance and direction. ■

For more information
about the EDA program,
scan this QR code.



ACE Spotlight: Millbrook's Recreational Investments Score Major Economic Opportunities for Region

Lori Jhons • Communications Director • ALM



Since incorporating 48 years ago, the city of Millbrook has grown from a small, suburban community into the largest city in Elmore County, with a population quickly approaching 18,000. It is located just 10 miles north of the capital city, making it attractive to those who want a little less hustle and bustle and more family-oriented, quality of life services. That is evident by the continuous growth in residential developments supported by those that are just starting their families to those looking to retire. Being close to Maxwell Air Force Base and the main offices of most state agencies contributes to a large presence of military and public servant families in the area. Today, the city of Millbrook is intent on maintaining its welcoming, charismatic appeal while investing in opportunities that will have generational impacts in its community and the entire region.

The Alabama League of Municipalities has had its eye on Millbrook's recent endeavors and is excited to delve into the magic happening behind the scenes as this magazine edition's Alabama Communities of Excellence feature story.

Millbrook was selected to participate in the ACE program in May 2005 and earned the designation of an Alabama Community of Excellence on April 23, 2007. Ann Harper, director of economic development for the city, has served as the ACE local coordinator since 2018. She said that her predecessor Carol Thompson was instrumental in securing Millbrook's designation as an ACE community along with Mayor Al Kelley, a native of Millbrook, who has served the city for 28 years.

ACE was created in 2002 to provide small communities, in the 2,000 to 18,000 population range, resources and knowledge that focus on the importance of planning, leadership development and broad-based community engagement. ACE provides community leaders with training and workshops to develop a vision and implementation strategies for their city.

Harper said, "Millbrook continues to take a proactive approach to keeping the ACE program relevant and impactful, ensuring that our citizens stay informed, engaged and actively participating in the city's development."

Councilman Michael Gay and Ann Harper show off the 17 Springs Fieldhouse.



Through the ACE three-phased approach, which consists of assessing a community's strengths and weaknesses, developing a strategic plan and implementing it, Millbrook has been successful in enhancing its economic development and quality of life efforts.

Using Outdoor Recreation as an Economic Catalyst

Outdoor recreation has long been a major focus of the community, which has six municipal parks and a municipal owned 18-hole golf course. The local Grandview Family YMCA offers unique amenities such as 190 acres of picnic areas, walking trails, a playground, athletic fields and its very own lake! Millbrook is also home to the Alabama Wildlife Federation (AWF), Alabama's oldest and largest nonprofit outdoor conservation organization, which operates the Alabama Nature Center. This facility includes an indoor conservation education center known as the NaturePlex and five miles of boardwalks and trails. ★

All of this is much more than many communities of this size can offer, but there is still more! The city's flagship economic driver, a \$100-million investment, is its recent creation of the 17 Springs multi-sport complex, which sits on a sprawling 200-acre site. The idea for 17 Springs, which is named after a historic art festival hosted decades ago in the Millbrook community on the Grandview YMCA property, was started in 2017 when the city of Millbrook, Grandview Family YMCA, Elmore County Board of Education, Elmore County Economic Development Authority and the Elmore County Commission started brainstorming conversations on how they could form a public-private partnership to pull together the resources to develop a project that could serve multiple purposes including recreational, entertainment and retail opportunities.

After meeting with other cities that built sport complexes, city leaders made it a goal to have enough courts and fields to host all levels of championship tournaments while also having event space to host conferences, trade shows, concerts and banquets. 17 Springs is being built in three phases. The first two phases were completed in August of 2023 and February of 2025. The property features 12 pickleball courts, 12 tennis courts, five multi-purpose turf fields designed for soccer and football, a 5,500-seat stadium with a competition track, six turf diamond fields and an 86,000-square-foot indoor venue called The Fieldhouse. The Fieldhouse features a 42,000-square-foot event space that can be transformed into four basketball courts, eight volleyball courts or 12 wrestling mats. It also has three conference rooms, a concession area, locker rooms and more. The facility even has the ability to livestream any of their events on any field or court through the service MuscoVision, so parents, family, friends and recruiters can watch athletic events in real time from anywhere.



*Photo credit:
Elmore County Commission*



Soccer is one of the many sports youth and adults are able to play at 17 Springs.

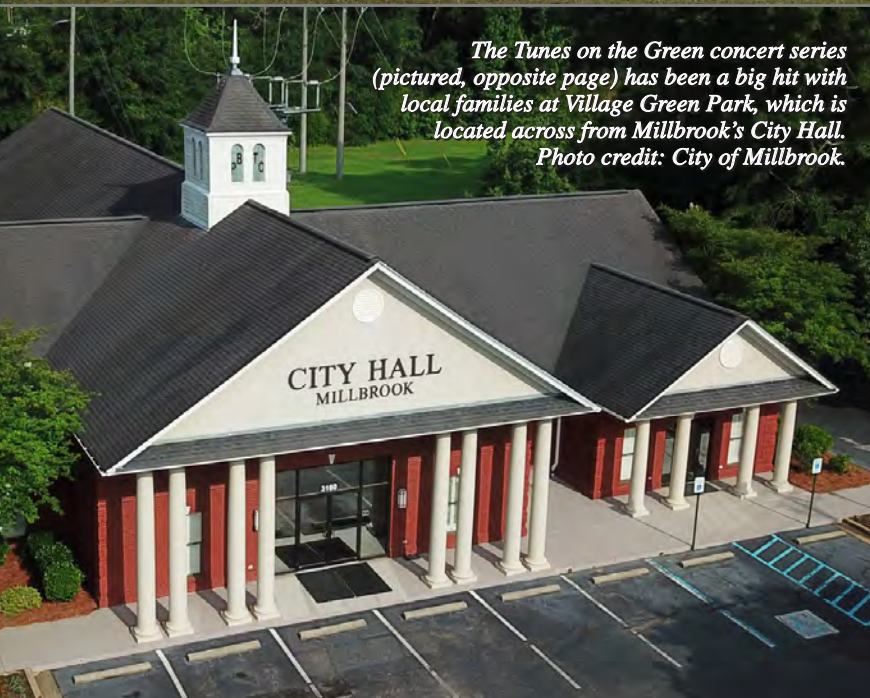


Phase three of construction is underway on The Marketplace at 17 Springs. See the orange areas for reference.

Carol Barksdale painted this welcoming mural on the side of an automotive business in Millbrook in 2023. Photo credit: Stephanie Williams Photography



The Tunes on the Green concert series (pictured, opposite page) has been a big hit with local families at Village Green Park, which is located across from Millbrook's City Hall. Photo credit: City of Millbrook.



Currently, phase three of construction is underway on The Marketplace at 17 Springs, the adjacent development that sits in front of the 17 Springs sports complex on State Highway 14. This commercial area offers pad-ready sites for sale and will offer a mix of dining, lodging, entertainment and health care opportunities. City officials have already announced that Baumhower's Victory Grille and a Southern Orthopedic Surgeons clinic will locate in The Marketplace, and they expect more announcements soon.

"ACE helped unite city and corporate leaders, business owners and economic developers around major projects like the 17 Springs project, which would not be possible without this collaboration and cooperation," Harper said. "That public-private partnership was only possible because of the groundwork laid through ACE's collaboration model."

Taking on a project this massive requires strong oversight. Instead of selecting a contract managing firm to run the 17 Springs operation, they chose to let local leaders step up to the plate and utilize the YMCA of Greater Montgomery, the parent organization to the Grandview Family YMCA, to manage the day-to-day operations. Justin Jones, who has served on the city council for 10 years, is 17 Springs' operations director. He is one of a team of three full-time workers that operate the facility on a daily basis. Through 17 Springs' public-private partnership they have the ability to bring in approximately 30 local YMCA staff members for big events.

"Part of our role here is to ensure that the complex is being utilized to its full potential by bringing in a variety of events to our complex and city. By bringing events here to 17 Springs, not only do we flourish but so does Elmore County, the city of Millbrook and our local business owners around the area," Councilman Jones said. "With the backing of the YMCA as one of the partners in the establishment of 17 Springs, we have access to a very large group of employees that have a heart for the community and for serving others."

Establishing a Family-Friendly Downtown

While the 17 Springs project is the economic catalyst for building up the Highway 14 corridor that runs through the highest trafficked area of the city, the downtown area is being developed with local entrepreneurship and residents in mind.

Council President Michael Gay was elected to office in 2013 and serves on the ALM Board of Directors. He explained, "17 Springs was the first

step for Millbrook to do our greater vision of building a downtown. While the 17 Springs project is about business, downtown is going to be about us where we can come together as a family and as a community and have fun and enjoy our town together.”



Although incorporated in 1977, Millbrook’s past dates back to being a part of the Creek Indian town of Coosawda. Originally called Edgewood, Millbrook was renamed in honor of the gristmill on the brook that flows through it. The area often served as a nearby summer retreat for wealthy Montgomery families. Its allure has attracted several notable state leaders to call it home including three governors: William Wyatt Bibb, who was appointed the first territorial governor of Alabama; Thomas Bibb, William’s brother who was the second governor of Alabama; and Benjamin Fitzpatrick, who was the eleventh governor of the state.

Following the completion of I-65 in the 1970s, Millbrook has capitalized on being conveniently located off of three interstate exits. Its main street is comprised of a four-lane highway that connects the southern segment, along Alabama River Parkway, and the northern segment, along Highway 14, with the downtown district.

“We don’t have the traditional downtown that some older cities have,” Harper shared. “We took the heart of the city, which is what we’re calling our downtown, and we’re crafting it really from the ground up.”

The city has partnered with Downtown Strategies, Place Associates and the Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission to identify and develop strategies for placemaking and creating economic opportunities in the main street area particularly around the Village Green Park, which is located across the street from the city hall. The city has also engaged DT Design Studio to provide design services for the downtown in the way of infrastructure improvements that will help support commercial development, parking areas, open space, walking paths, outdoor gathering areas and recreational amenities. They are hopeful this will allow them to host new events to attract visitors, increase walkability and enhance the downtown experience.

So far, they opened a new senior center in 2022; they repurposed an old home into a community arts facility called The Art Mill in 2023; they launched a program to create murals throughout the city; and they have added a new community festival (MayFest) and an outdoor concert series at the Village Green Park during the spring and fall. Lastly, this year, they recruited a Big Mike’s Steakhouse to locate downtown. It is expected to open in late October and create 35 full-time and part-time jobs.

“It’s a great blessing for our downtown area to have Big Mike’s Steakhouse open here in Millbrook, and it’s going to be a great financial benefit. Not only a financial benefit, but just a benefit for this part of town,” Mayor Kelley said. “We’ve been looking for that catalyst project to launch the downtown area, and Big Mike’s Steakhouse is it.”

Strengthening Local Partnerships for Future Growth

In addition to the downtown and 17 Springs initiatives, the city continues to encourage retail and hotel development projects in other areas of the city by cultivating a business-friendly environment and identifying partnership and collaborative opportunities. The city also periodically updates its strategic plan and uses its ACE designation as part of the team’s economic recruitment process.

“From an economic development perspective, going through a strategic planning process validates that we are a ‘business-ready’ and a ‘capable’ community,” Harper said. “The fact that Millbrook has an ACE status may make us more attractive to potential businesses, investors and developers.”



Likewise, she believes having the ACE status improves her community's position when applying for state or federal grants for infrastructure and development needs.

The city of Millbrook has worked hard to increase its retail footprint. In July of 2024, it opened a Publix grocery store that employs approximately 135 people. This retail development also has additional retail space that includes a Korean barbecue restaurant, nail salon, hair salon and two outparcels, one of which has been developed into a 7-Brew Coffee Shop. Just a half mile away, another retail shopping strip has been completed and is now accepting tenants. The city's planning and zoning department has been bombarded with questions and requests for site plan reviews in recent months indicating that there is a lot more on the horizon to come for Millbrook.

City officials attribute much of their success to their broader mission of enhancing Millbrook's quality of life and economic vitality through strategic partnerships and community engagement. The city has embarked on a new and stronger collaborative relationship with the Millbrook Area Chamber of Commerce and other groups in the River Region.

Harper explained, "It is important to connect with surrounding communities when developing plans because they may be able to help with the project, particularly if it's beneficial to them as well or there is reciprocity."

For example, the city of Millbrook is one of five participants that collectively make up the newly formed West Elmore Sewer Group (WESG). The other participants are the town of Elmore, the town of Deatsville, Elmore Water and Sewer Authority and the Elmore County Commission. Formalized in 2022, the WESG creates a mechanism to expand access to sanitary sewer service in western Elmore County and helps free up treatment capacity at the Millbrook Wastewater Treatment Plant by constructing a Unified Sewer Line (USL) that connects to the Wetumpka Water and Sewer Board's sewage treatment facility. Each participant will have access to the USL once completed by the end of 2026. This project will help support future economic growth in the city.

"As projects are implemented, the city continues to engage the public by providing updates on the status of projects and seeking community input on ongoing initiatives," Harper said. "This commitment to transparency and involvement helps maintain public support and ensures that development aligns with the community's evolving needs."

All these efforts demonstrate Millbrook's commitment to growth by investing in infrastructure, attracting businesses, enhancing quality of life and fostering a collaborative environment. We will be rooting for the city of Millbrook and wish them great success in the years ahead! ■



The City of

Millbrook
Alabama

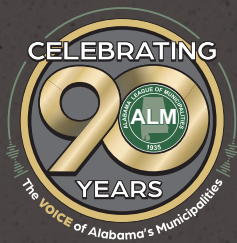
COMFORT • CONVENIENCE • COMMUNITY



Millbrook city officials and company representatives broke ground on the new Publix site in August 2023. Photo credit: Stephanie Williams Photography



For more information
about the ACE program,
scan this QR code.



Review of the 2025 Legislative Session

Baker Allen • Director of Governmental Affairs • ALM
and Kaleb Beck • Legislative Counsel • ALM

As the League celebrated its 90th year of serving as the voice of Alabama's municipalities, the Alabama Legislature met for the 2025 Legislative Session beginning Feb. 4. For decades, the League has worked diligently to educate legislators on the importance of municipal government. Those grassroots efforts continue to serve as the backbone of the League's effectiveness at the state house.

Despite the many friends we have in the Legislature, every year some legislators want to play mayor from Montgomery. Starting before the session, through its conclusion on May 14, the advocacy team fought to keep decision-making authority closest to the people—at the municipal level. However, the most powerful advocate is you. When a House member receives a text from a councilmember in his district or a senator answers a phone call from her mayor that lives down the street, the implications of legislation become real. Your leadership and initiative are the keys to 90 years of successful advocacy.

Without robust municipal governments, most legislation would be ineffective at the community level.

Legislative leadership remained unchanged this session with the exception of a new pro tem. Greg Reed left the Senate to become the secretary of the newly created Alabama Department of Workforce. The Senate elected Sen. Garlan Gudger – a former Cullman city councilmember – to serve as the next pro tem. While there was little change for the Legislature, the League's advocacy team saw several changes for this session. I was proud to take over as the director of governmental affairs. Additionally, Kaleb Beck moved from the legal department to become legislative counsel, and Adam Kilpatrick was hired to serve as grassroots coordinator. After session, Lillian Pitman – former League intern – joined the team as legislative policy analyst.

ADV
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2025 Regular Legislative Session

From the get-go, the governor and legislative leadership focused on a set of priorities, most of which were tackled at the start of the session. Like other sessions, major topics developed throughout including regulating pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and authorizing an ALFA health plan. Several other major topics were immigration, education, public safety, tax cuts and health care.

Even with several years in a row of major tax cuts, the Alabama Legislature passed record budgets. The General



Gardendale Mayor Stan Hogeland congratulated Alabama's new Senate pro tem, Sen. Garlan Gudger, on Feb. 12, 2025.

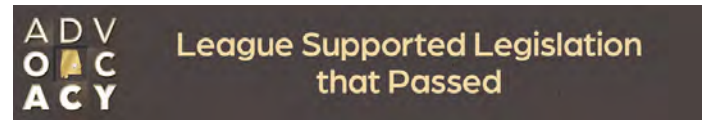


Guin Mayor Phil Segraves greeted Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter at Advocacy Day.

Fund budget for fiscal year 2026 totaled \$3.8 billion. Some of the major changes from the last budget include increased funding for airport development grants, the Alabama Medicaid Agency and the Alabama Department of Corrections. The budget for education, which is mostly made up of the Education Trust Fund, totaled \$12.2 billion. The budget prioritized increased funding for new career tech programs, a new workers compensation fund, parental leave policy and the CHOOSE Act.

The only way to know what a bill does is to read it. With 967 bills filed, the League's bill review team developed an in-depth review process. Most bills impacting municipalities are obvious, but at times legislation intended to address one issue will unintentionally impact municipalities. The League's bill review process involves meeting twice a week during session. This process allows the advocacy team to manage the

large number of bills and respond quickly to legislation. By the end of session, the League tracked bills can be categorized as 10 supported; 14 opposed, 320 neutral; 366 monitored; 176 pertained to local issues; and 79 related to education.



Act 2025-404, carried by Rep. Terri Collins, creates a Rural Hospital Investment Program. Additionally, the act establishes limits on the credit including a sunset provision for tax year 2028 and a local government support requirement equal to 10% or more of a hospital's limit.

Act 2025-399, carried by Rep. Reed Ingram, provides that one-half of fines arising from a conviction for operating a motor vehicle without a current license plate are distributed

to the agency employing the arresting officer, and one-half are distributed in the same manner as motor vehicle licenses and registration fees. If a local law enforcement officer issues a ticket for a special access or disability parking violation, all of the fines collected are paid to the agency employing the officer.

Act 2025-280, carried by Rep. Alan Baker, provides conditions under which a county or municipality may adopt local sales and use tax exemptions. Notably, this legislation limits the Legislature's ability to make sales tax exemptions apply to local governments. If municipalities want to provide or remove a tax exemption on eligible items, they must provide notice by July 1 to the Alabama Department of Revenue and have an effective date of September 1.

Act 2025-331, carried by Rep. Cynthia Almond, clarifies the procedures for an aggrieved party to file an appeal of the final decision of a municipal zoning board of adjustment in circuit court. A notice of appeal would be required to be filed within 15 days after the final decision to the board, and for an appeal to the circuit court to be filed within 30 days after the final decision of the board. The decision of the board would remain in effect during the appeal, unless the circuit court grants a stay.

Top: The advocacy team works closely with Senate Pro Tem Garlan Gudger throughout the session.

Bottom: Senate Pro Tem Gudger and Speaker Ledbetter pose for a photo with Fairhope Mayor Sherry Sullivan and Mayor Mark Saliba at Advocacy Day.

Opposite: Legislative leadership shared their 2025 legislative priorities with municipal leaders during a panel discussion.



HB14 by Rep. Reed Ingram, if passed, would have authorized the attorney general and governor to appoint an interim police chief of certain municipal police departments. This bill never made it out of its house of origin.

HB36 by Rep. Chris England, if passed, would have increased the Simplified Sellers Use Tax (SSUT) to 9.25% with the additional 1.25% going to local boards of education; however, it did not make it to the House floor.

HB362 by Rep. Chris Sells, if passed, would have required local governments and local boards of education to record and make available online each open and public meeting of the body; however, it did not make it to the House floor.

HB475 by Rep. Ernie Yarbrough and SB100 by Sen. Larry Stutts, if passed, would have capped increases in the assessed value of real property to not more than the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the immediately preceding year. This bill could have negatively affected municipal revenues.

SB12 by Sen. Chris Elliot, if passed, would have prohibited a state or local agency from requiring, as a condition for issuing certain types of licenses or permits to a person, that the person first obtain a different license or permit from another state or local agency. The League heavily engaged in opposing this bill and were successful in keeping the bill off the Senate floor.

SB29 by Sen. Chris Elliot, if passed, would have required governmental bodies, if no law provides for a time frame,

to approve or deny any application for a license, permit, or other certification within 45 days of receiving the application, unless this time frame is waived by the applicant; and, if the governmental body does not take action within 45 days, the license, permit, or other certification shall be deemed approved. The League heavily engaged in opposing this bill and were successful in keeping the bill off the Senate floor.

SB249 by Sen. Gerald Allen, if passed, would have required 30 days' notice and a public hearing before voting on a tax or license fee increase. Public engagement is tantamount to good governance; however, decisions like this are best made at the local level.

SB306 by Sen. Wes Kitchens, if passed, would have required municipal governments with discretionary accounts to publish monthly their discretionary account fund amounts and expenditures online. The League expects this bill to be filed again next year.

SB307 by Sen. Keith Kelley, if passed, would have required the online publication of financials, audits, monthly expenditures and budgets of counties and municipalities. The League expects this bill to be filed again next year.

SB344 by Sen. Gerald Allen, if passed, would have required that any governmental entity responsible for a memorial building that decides to demolish the building shall ensure that any replacement building or replacement park or green space maintains the name of the original building. If the building is not replaced, the governmental entity shall erect a marker to memorialize the person or event for which the memorial building was originally named. Additionally, the bill increases the penalty for not seeking a waiver as required by law from twenty-five thousand dollars per violation to five thousand dollars for each day that a violation continues.

Any petition for a waiver is deemed denied if the Committee on Alabama Monument Protection fails to act on an application for waiver within 90 days.

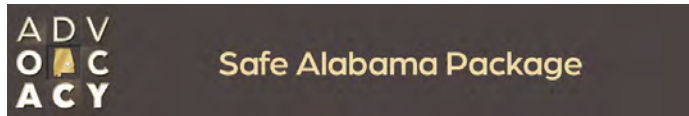
HB241 and HB566 by Rep. Brett Easterbrook, if passed, would have prohibited a municipality from requiring the approval of a registered architect or professional engineer on plans for the construction of a single-family residence under three stories. These bills would have significantly undermined municipal authority and put public health and safety at risk. These bills failed to make it out of committee in their house of origin.

SB275 by Sen. Dan Roberts, if passed, would have exempted a mobile food vendor from obtaining individual licenses or other requisite permissions from local jurisdictions when the mobile



food vendor travels outside the jurisdiction of its permanent commissary. The League expects this bill to be filed again next year.

ALM opposed these bills, and we appreciate our membership for reaching out to their delegation to ask that they continue to allow local governments to manage local resources how they best see fit, in an effort to address local needs.



One common theme for this session, from our governor and legislative leaders to our municipal leaders, was to strengthen public safety in the state. The governor's Safe Alabama Package recognized that bolstering public safety depends considerably on prioritizing law enforcement support and violent crime prevention. We commend the governor and her staff for supporting local law enforcement and for prioritizing making Alabama and its communities safe.

Act 2025-423, carried by Rep. Rex Reynolds, provides law enforcement with enhanced legal protections. Under this new protection, a law enforcement officer would be entitled immunity in a civil lawsuit unless he or she acted recklessly without law enforcement justification, or he or she violated a person's clearly established rights. Additionally, a law enforcement officer would be entitled to immunity in a criminal prosecution for on-the-job use of force unless his or her conduct violated a person's constitutional rights against excessive force.

Act 2025-62, carried by Sen. Clyde Chambliss, broadens the existing crime of "impersonating a peace officer" to include individuals who accept employment as a peace officer while knowing they are ineligible to serve or knowing that their state mandated training certification has been revoked or suspended. Additionally, it would prohibit employers from hiring individuals they know are prohibited from serving as peace officers under the same circumstances.

Act 2025-273, carried by Sen. Will Barfoot, expands and strengthens firearm possession laws, heightens penalties for shootings into occupied buildings, and expands judicial tools for detaining violent offenders prior to trial. Most provisions of Act 2025-273 will become effective on October 1, 2025, with the exception of the Aniah's Law amendment, which will take effect upon ratification of the constitutional amendment proposed by Act 2025-227.

Act 2025-54, carried by Sen. Will Barfoot, makes it a Class C felony to knowingly possess a part or combination

of parts designed to convert a pistol into a fully automatic machine gun, otherwise known as a "glock switch".

Act 2025-422, carried by Rep. Travis Hendrix, allows the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Parole or any other state agency to provide electronic monitoring services to children released by a juvenile court pending disposition of their case. Additionally, this act repeals the 72-hour limitation on confinement of juvenile status offenders who have violated a valid court order.

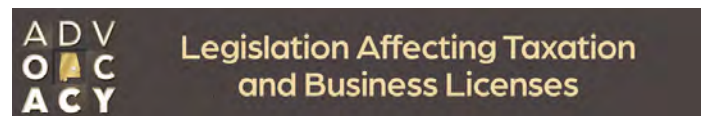
HB188 by Rep. Allen Treadway, if passed, would establish the Alabama Law Enforcement Officers' Family Scholarship Program, designed to boost recruitment and retention of law



Gov. Kay Ivey hosted a ceremonial bill signing for the Safe Alabama Package on June 12, 2025.

enforcement by providing financial assistance for college tuition and associated expenses to eligible dependents of long-serving law enforcement officers.

Take a look at some of the challenges and opportunities we are hoping these new laws will help with improving by scanning the QR code. We appreciate Gov. Ivey and the Legislature for supporting local law enforcement, and we are committed to keeping these conversations alive in the years to come on ways to improve public safety.



Act 2025-377, carried by Rep. David Faulkner, establishes a state excise tax rate on consumable vaping products. Twenty-five percent of that excise tax would go to municipal governments. The League added language to the original bill to clarify certain aspects of municipal licensing and taxing

authority as it pertains to consumable vaping products. However, the League is awaiting further clarification from the appropriate state agencies.

Act 2025-305, carried by Rep. Danny Garrett, lowers the state's food tax to 2%. This legislation also removes the restrictions on the conditions for local governments to lower their food tax.

Act 2025-448, carried by Rep. Rolanda Hollis, creates a new category of tobacco products, heated tobacco products. Municipalities can only collect half the excise rates of cigarettes on heated tobacco products.

Act 2025-396, carried by Sen. Gerald Allen, limits the franchise fee on natural and manufactured gas utilities. Starting December 31, 2025, franchise fees are capped at 3% unless the increase is approved during an election.

Legislation to exempt certain items from sales tax occurs every year. This year, the League was able to include opt-in provisions so that a municipality can decide if it wants to exempt those items from its sales taxes. Additionally, these bills include sunset dates for when the exemption expires. That legislation includes:

- Act 2025-304, carried by Rep. Neil Raferty, exempts certain baby supplies, baby formula, maternity clothing and menstrual hygiene products.
- Act 2025-240, carried by Rep. Brock Colvin, exempts the sale and lease of certain aircraft and aircraft parts.

Legislation Affecting Reporting Requirements

Act 2025-408, carried by Sen. Clyde Chambliss, makes several changes affecting business licenses. First, annually by March 30, local governments shall report business license rate information to the Alabama Department of Revenue. Additionally, appeals of business license tax decisions will be handled by the Alabama Tax Tribunal.

Other Legislation that the League Advocacy Team Engaged On

Act 2025-201, carried by Rep. Bubba Underwood, prohibits sex offenders from being employed or volunteering as a first responder.

Act 2025-383, carried by Rep. Chris Pringle, provides that publication of a bid advertisement on a centralized website operated by the Alabama Department of Finance would serve as a safe harbor for the award of a public works contract in the event a newspaper fails to complete the publication.

Act 2025-46, carried by Sen. Chris Elliott, allows sheriffs or local police chiefs to contract with nonpublic K-12 schools for school resource officers.

Act 2025-306, carried by Sen. Lance Bell, mandates that law enforcement collect fingerprints and DNA from illegal aliens in custody and submit them for testing or cataloging.

Act 2025-409, carried by Sen. Clyde Chambliss, allows certain retired fire medics to return to work as fire medics without losing their retirement benefits for a limited period and includes additional income caps.

Act 2025-395, carried by Sen. Garland Gudger, makes changes to the Alabama Massage Therapy Licensing Board. If the executive director of the massage therapy board believes a massage therapy establishment is in violation of a local, municipal, or other applicable law, the executive director shall notify local law enforcement of the possible violations.

Act 2025-405, carried by Sen. Rodger Smitherman, creates a new Alabama Beverage Control license for special events held on government owned property.

Stay Engaged!

The 2026 Legislative Session starts January 13! Starting conversations with your legislators during session is too late. Take the time to regularly meet with them and share the good work your municipality is doing for its community.

Want to protect municipal authority? The easiest way to start is by getting involved with the League. Make sure to participate in the Certified Municipal Official program, utilize Live Locally Alabama campaign assets, serve on a standing committee and attend our events and trainings. During the session, you can also read our weekly legislative newsletter, *State House Advocate* (see below).

We look forward to seeing you at Advocacy Day on January 21! ■

STATE HOUSE ADVOCATE

This Week in League Advocacy



Interested in receiving the weekly
State House Advocate
during the Legislative Session? If so, contact
Annabel Patton, Membership Clerk,
at apatton@almonline.org to update your
email address. Stay up-to-date on all of the
legislative issues the League is following.

New NLC Senior Regional Specialist Highlights Value of NLC Membership

Katya Mayer • Senior Regional Specialist (Southern Region) • NLC

I am thrilled to introduce myself as the new senior regional specialist for the southern region at the National League of Cities (NLC). In this role, I have the privilege of working with city leaders across the south to support local priorities, strengthen national engagement and make sure our members have the tools they need to thrive.

NLC is here for you. Whether it is through our federal advocacy, access to critical funding resources, training and leadership development or peer-to-peer networks. Our mission is to lift up local voices and help communities of all sizes tackle today's challenges and seize tomorrow's opportunities.

However, it is always better to hear from your peers and people in your community. That is why I am so excited to spotlight **Saraland Councilwoman Veronica Hudson** and **Gadsden Councilwoman Dixie Minatra**, who are not only making a difference in their cities but they are also stepping up nationally through NLC to help shape solutions, share best practices and represent their communities on a broader stage.



Councilwoman Veronica Hudson, what has your membership experience been like with NLC?

My membership experience with NLC has been both enriching and empowering. Over the past 12 years, I have found the organization to be a supportive and inspiring community of leaders committed to strengthening local government. Being surrounded by like-minded public servants from across the country has helped broaden my perspective on municipal issues and deepen my passion for service.



Saraland Mayor Howard Rubenstein and the Saraland City Council earned the Certified Municipality Award in 2023.

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

I have taken full advantage of the professional development workshops, grant writing seminars and networking opportunities offered by NLC. The Women in Municipal Government (WIMG) sessions, in particular, have provided a safe space for learning, growth and leadership development. Additionally, NLC's legislative briefings and policy updates have been vital tools in helping me stay informed and advocate effectively for my community.

Which benefit(s) are your favorite and why?

My favorite benefit is the access to educational sessions and training at the Congressional City Conference. These gatherings are full of practical, actionable content that I bring back and apply

to my city. I also value the strong connections I have built through WIMG and the inspiration I have drawn from other women leaders across the nation.

What is the most unique part about being a member of NLC?

The most unique aspect of being an NLC member is the opportunity to influence national policy through local leadership. Few organizations connect local voices directly to federal decision-makers the way NLC does. The sense of unity and shared purpose among leaders from diverse communities is both rare and powerful.

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

Through my participation in NLC, I have gained valuable insight and tools that I have brought back to my city. Whether it is advocating for infrastructure, promoting health initiatives or expanding community engagement, the knowledge shared at NLC has had a direct, positive impact. These resources have helped shape policy and improve the quality of life for our residents.

I am proud to share a few key initiatives and leadership roles that reflect Saraland's commitment to public health and community well-being:

Smoke-Free City Leadership: I sponsored the city ordinance that made Saraland the first city in Mobile County to become a smoke-free city, a major step toward promoting healthier environments for our residents.

Healthy Alabama Community Initiative: I am currently leading efforts for Saraland to become a Healthy Alabama Community (HAC). If successful, we will become the second city in the state to earn this distinction. This initiative focuses on increasing access to nutritious food, encouraging physical activity and building a strong culture of health through cross-sector collaboration.

Mobile County Municipal Association Leadership: I am honored to serve as the vice president of the Mobile County Municipal Association, where I work alongside fellow local leaders to advance regional priorities and share resources that strengthen our municipalities.

I credit much of my development as a municipal leader to my longtime involvement with the National League of Cities. It was through NLC that I found my voice and the confidence to champion transformative initiatives that positively impact my community.



Why should more communities in Alabama get involved with NLC?

NLC provides an incredible platform for learning, collaboration and advocacy. For Alabama communities, it is a chance to gain a national voice, access innovative ideas and bring back best practices that can drive local progress. More engagement from our state means stronger representation and more opportunity to shape federal policy that benefits Alabama's cities and towns.

What is your most memorable NLC experience?

One of my most memorable moments was attending a WIMG session where women leaders shared their journeys through public service. Hearing their authentic stories of challenges and triumphs reignited my passion and reminded me of the importance of having more women at the table. Another unforgettable highlight was meeting Tyler Perry during a WIMG Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. That same year, I also connected with peers who have since become trusted collaborators and lifelong friends.



Councilwoman Dixie Minatra, what has your membership experience been like with NLC?

As a first term councilwoman, the NLC has been invaluable, making so much information available under one umbrella. The Washington, D.C. trips have been filled with knowledge about our council's role in local government and have given us access to policymakers on the federal level. The fall conferences have offered a chance to see the best of the host cities through mobile workshops as well as to network with our peers across the country and benefit from the information presented by them in the sessions.

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

I have served on NLC’s Information and Technology Committee. I have learned a great deal about our broadband opportunities for my city/county. I have learned how to navigate tools from my state and the Federal Communication Commission with updates as to the funding that continues to flow to add more internet access.

Which benefit(s) are your favorite and why?

Again, for me as a first term, the conferences are my favorite benefit. The agendas/daily schedules are packed full of learning more about city government, impressive national speakers and breakout sessions that allow us to choose subjects tailored to the needs of my city and the district that I serve.



What is the most unique part about being a member of NLC?

For me, it was attending the Kansas City conference, where I got to see a village that serves veterans who need support with transitional housing and personal services. Plus, Kansas City gave us alternatives for helping the homeless population with housing options. Both experiences were beyond my expectations.

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

In our city, five of our seven councilmembers are serving first terms. We all have benefited from the conference training, especially the roundtable discussions and vendor expos. Furthermore, as a bonus, our experiences away from home gave us a chance to bond together as a council group.

Why should more communities in Alabama get involved with NLC?

I believe every newly elected council person should attend NLC conferences to learn and perhaps be exposed to things that they may not have known living in their city.

What is your most memorable NLC experience?

Washington, D.C. trips are my most memorable experiences! The opportunities to meet personally with our representatives in the House and Senate to discuss our city’s opportunities and needs were most valuable.

If you ever wondered how to get more out of your NLC membership, these leaders offer a great roadmap. From serving on committees and councils to joining events and webinars, there are so many ways to get involved, no matter your community’s size or where you are in your leadership journey.

I am here to be your navigator throughout NLC. Whether you are looking to join the organization, are new to NLC or are looking to engage more, I would love to help you find the right place to plug in. Let us explore together how NLC can support you, your goals and amplify your impact.

Please reach out to me anytime at kmayer@nlc.org. I would love to connect, learn more about your city and help you take the next step in your NLC journey. ■

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◇ **October 1 – 2**
Tuscaloosa

◇ **November 5 – 6**
Huntsville

◇ **October 29 – 30**
Montgomery*

◇ **November 12 – 13**
Daphne

* Montgomery location includes the 2025 League Graduation & Awards Ceremony.

The Alabama League of Municipalities will host four regional orientation trainings for **new and veteran** municipal officials during October and November. These trainings are hosted every four years following the majority of municipal elections to provide an overview of ALM's mission, services and programs as well as legal, finance and ethics training from League staff and the Alabama Ethics Commission. These orientations also serve as an opportunity to introduce elected officials to new laws and regulations, current municipal issues, contacts and resources for solving day-to-day problems and provide an opportunity to discuss municipal problems with fellow officials.

This year's League Graduation and Awards Ceremony (usually held after the Municipal Leadership Institute) will be held following the orientation session in Montgomery on October 30.

Orientation topics will include:

- Municipal Finances
- Authority to Expend Municipal Funds
- Council Meeting Procedures
- Ethics Training
- General Powers of Municipalities
- Duties of the Mayor and Council
- Open Meetings Act

Who Should Attend:

ALL elected officials (newly elected and incumbent mayors and councilmembers) are encouraged to attend. Municipal employees are welcome to participate too. However, only elected officials will be awarded credit hours in the CMO Program.

Find more information and Register

Register for one of four locations offered around the state (*officials only need to attend one event in their respective location*). Detailed information for each location, including parking, hotel availability and driving directions can be found on the League's website, www.almonline.org, or by scanning the QR code.

View our refund policy online when you register, and please note that each location has a different registration deadline.



SERVICE AND SUPPORT:

HOW ALABAMA IS TAKING CARE OF ITS VETERANS EVERY DAY

JEFFREY L. NEWTON ★ COMMISSIONER ★ ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

We are on a mission to become the nation's most veteran-friendly state. This goal is grounded in respect, gratitude and a long-standing tradition of service. Each comes with the acknowledgement and understanding of the vital importance of honoring those who served and ensuring they and their families are supported every step of the way.

Under the leadership of Gov. Kay Ivey and alongside the Alabama Legislature, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) is leading this mission, through which Alabama is expanding access to critical services and streamlining pathways to care, education, housing and employment for veterans. State-led veteran-specific initiatives, like the Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee, Veterans Treatment Courts and Alabama Veterans Resource Center, along with strengthened partnerships, underscore Alabama's commitment to helping veterans after their military careers.

Before diving too deep into current benefits and future projects to best serve Alabama's veterans, it is important to understand the difference between the ADVA and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) – namely that we are *not* the same entity. While USDVA is a federal agency and broken into three categories – Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and the National Cemetery Administration – the ADVA is a member of the governor's cabinet and has four primary programs geared specifically to Alabama veterans.

ADVA's veterans service offices are the foundation of our mission. We have 62 offices across the state with accredited officers who assist veterans and their loved ones with filing

for claims and benefits. Best of all, this service is free of charge. We also serve our veterans through long-term skilled nursing care at our five state veterans homes and offer tuition assistance for the dependents of qualifying disabled veterans with our G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program. Lastly, we serve the heroes among us through eternity by providing a final resting place for veterans and their loved ones at the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Spanish Fort.

Beyond these programs, outreach is a critical piece of our mission. This recognizes that serving veterans effectively requires a community of support and outpouring. There is

Gov. Kay Ivey appointed Brigadier General (Ret.) Jeffrey Newton as the commissioner of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs on March 19, 2025.



The 2025 ADVA Annual Training Conference was held in Enterprise.



no better example than in April 2025 when veterans at the CSM Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise were displaced due to a fire. The city of Enterprise and the Wiregrass community responded with exceptional support and solidarity – from local officials to emergency responders and community members quickly mobilizing to assist us ensuring the safety and well-being of the residents. Support has remained, as the community continues providing donations to residents and offering emotional support and collective efforts that reflect a deep commitment to honoring and protecting their local veterans in a time of urgent need.

Another example of support and buy-in came at the Alabama League of Municipalities' convention in May when more than 50 members signed up to participate in the ADVA's Operation We Remember campaign. This is a veteran suicide prevention awareness campaign that was established in 2022 to honor and remember the Alabama veterans who have lost their lives to suicide. It originally was formed through partnerships with colleges and universities but last year was expanded to include government agencies and high schools.

This September, during National Suicide Prevention Month, the campaign will once again expand – tripling in size with the addition of municipalities – as we honor those veterans with flag displays across our state. One flag will represent each veteran lost to suicide in 2023 – 139 in total. The displays aim to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental health challenges while also promoting conversations about support.

Ultimately, these partnerships create a significant impact in expanding the reach of promoting veterans suicide prevention and well-being. No single agency or group can meet every need of every veteran, but through intentional collaboration, we all can create a comprehensive, statewide support system that honors veterans not just in words, but in action.

Serving veterans in Alabama is not only a matter of gratitude but a vital responsibility that reflects our values as a state and nation. Alabama is home to approximately 400,000 veterans. These men and women have sacrificed their lives to protect our freedoms, and some retire or face separate significant challenges – ranging from physical and mental health issues to difficulty accessing employment, housing and education. Taking action to serve our veterans is essential to ensure they receive the respect, care and opportunities they deserve.

Employment and reintegration into civilian life remain a hurdle for some veterans, which is why Alabama has made veterans' employment a top priority. Despite having valuable skills and experience, some veterans may lack certifications or face difficulty translating military roles into civilian job opportunities. We continue to work closely with the Alabama Department of Workforce to elevate these issues and have found their services and programs to be game changers. We are excited to continue this collaborative effort with the establishment of the Alabama Veterans Resource Center, which will be a centralized hub to provide comprehensive support services to veterans.





Commissioner Newton shared information about the ADVA's initiatives at the League's convention this year in Huntsville.

Regardless of the need, we are focused on building systems that work for our veterans – creating pathways for success and ensuring they feel seen and supported long after their service ends. Whether through policy, volunteerism or everyday advocacy, every Alabamian has a role to play in standing with our veterans.

Under the leadership of Gov. Ivey and the Alabama Legislature, we are seeing the positive impacts of Alabama's

service every day. The ADVA remains committed to ensuring that no veteran is left behind – and we know we cannot do it alone. That is why we are inviting you to join us in this mission. **We are ready to work with you – because serving veterans takes all of us.**

Learn more at va.alabama.gov by scanning the QR code. ■



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Making Your Local Waterways a COMMUNITY ASSET

Alabama communities are creatively using local waterways to bring in recreation and tourism. Thinking ahead about protecting local waterways may be in your communities' best interest.

Laura Cooley • Project Manager • Auburn University Water Resources Center

Thinking about our local waterways as community assets can help us expand recreational and fishing opportunities, while also encouraging us to protect our valuable natural resources long-term. Alabama has an exceptional number of waterways that can be leveraged to expand the state's ecotourism industry, but currently many of our local waters remain underutilized, underappreciated and underprotected.

The Value of Alabama's Waterways

The value of Alabama's rivers includes their ability to grow the state's economy while promoting recreation and tourism. Fishing tournaments, such as the Alabama Bass Trail and the Alabama Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo, draw significant crowds and generate revenue for local communities. Ecotourism like canoeing, camping and kayaking trips also bring in significant revenue although it can be more difficult to measure. Alabama's rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands are home to more species of aquatic and semiaquatic animals

than any other state in the country, which is a major boon to kayakers, fishers and birdwatchers alike.

Here is the catch (pun intended): water recreation relies on clean healthy waterways and public access points. We must protect our waterways to protect our hunting and fishing assets and give people access to those resources. We may no longer be transporting goods on barges, but plenty of Alabamians still want to get out on our waterways—and that number keeps growing as more communities see the value of their natural resources. Sometimes the change must start with a vision.

Rivers of Opportunity

How could your community rethink its existing water resources? Consider these inspiring examples from across the state of creative ways to leverage local waterways into a community asset.

Photo credit: Scott Baker Photography, courtesy of the Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourism Association

Blueways and Trail Systems

The Coastal Alabama Back Bay Blueway has four trails and 21 launch points for paddlers across Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and Fort Morgan. You can stop by the Gulf Shores Welcome Center on the way into town and pick up a copy of the launch points. This effort spans multiple cities to make the Back Bay Blueway accessible to locals and visitors alike.

The Cahaba Blueway is in the process of becoming a formal “water trail” on the Cahaba River by providing the infrastructure, branding and information needed to make accessing the river easier. The University of Alabama Center for Economic Development (UACED) has worked with the Cahaba River Society, The Nature Conservancy, Cahaba Riverkeeper, Freshwater Land Trust and the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program to realize the Cahaba River’s potential through the Cahaba Blueway initiative. Learn more at <https://www.cahabablueway.org/>.

Creekline Trails of Opelika is a citizen-led project in Lee County, AL developing multi-use creekside trails and greenways along the watershed streams of Opelika. Originally starting as a vision by community leaders, it has become a collaborative effort with the city and other organizations in Opelika. After participating in the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, Creekline Trails has leveraged multiple other small grants and city support to begin trail building, which has resulted in a popular walking trail. Learn more at <https://creeklineopelika.org/>.

The Singing River Trail will be a more than 200-mile greenway system that strengthens regional bonds and creates new health and wellness, educational, economic, tourism and entrepreneurial opportunities for the people and communities of north Alabama. At the start of 2025, the Singing River Trail had finished planning 180 miles of new trails and was actively planning 67 additional trails. Learn more at <https://singingrivertrail.com/>.



Paddlers kayak on the Coastal Alabama Back Bay Blueway.

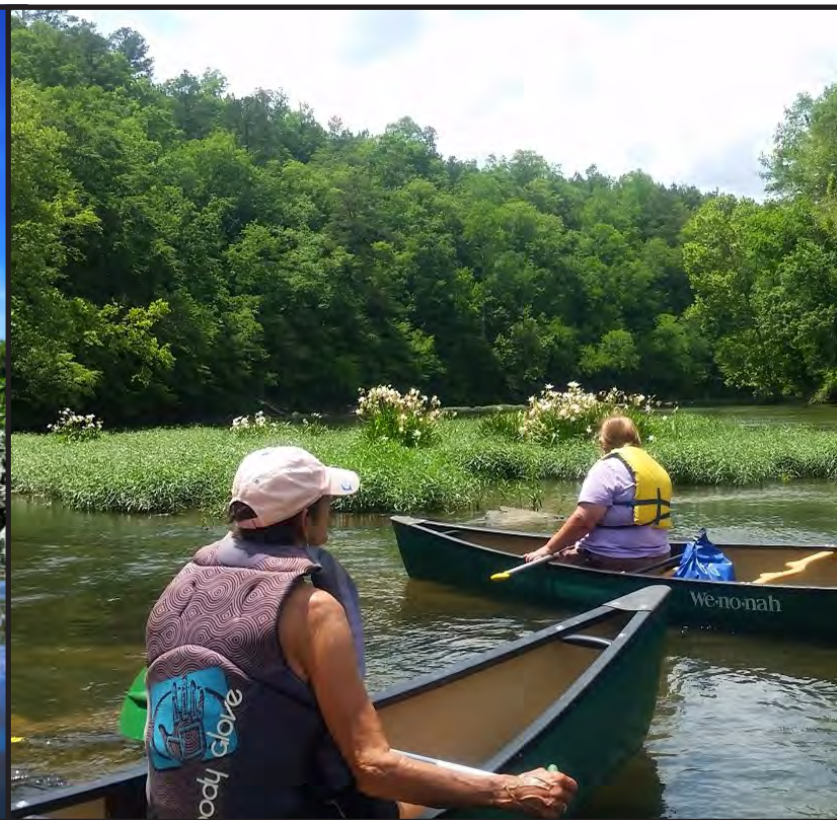
Events, Organizations and Entrepreneurs

East Alabama Fly Fishing: This organization connects expert river guides with interested fly-fishers to provide one-of-a-kind drift boat fly fishing experiences across east Alabama. They offer half to full day float trips where participants fish for Alabama Bass (spotted bass), Tallapoosa Bass (formerly known as Redeye Bass) and learn about the nuances of the waterways.

Alabama Scenic River Trail: (ASRT) is a nonprofit with a mission to get more people on the water. ASRT features specific paddle trails across the state and highlights access points and available outfitters for outdoor recreation trips. Their Alabama Waterway Enhancement Program provides small grants for launch sites, safety equipment, educational programs, paddling or cleanup events. Learn more at <https://www.alabamascenicrivertrail.com/>.

Annual River Fests: Various communities across Alabama host river fests: community wide events that celebrate getting out on the water and bringing people together. Some examples include Tallapoosa River Fest, New Site River Fest and Grand River Fest.

Dog River Clearwater Revival (DRCR): This organization's goal is to protect the health of the Dog River Watershed in Mobile County by actively engaging the community through various programs. They test water quality, remove trash, restore wetlands and promote waterway access. The Dog River Scenic Blueway provides recreational opportunities, access points and stewardship opportunities. They also host the annual MudBottom Revival Music Festival as a way to raise awareness and funds for DRCR's ongoing Dog River improvement projects. Learn more at <https://dogriver.org/>.



Left: East Alabama Fly Fishing offers one-of-a-kind drift boat fly fishing experiences across east Alabama. **Right:** Tourists canoe the Cahaba River among Cahaba Lilly blooms.

How to Get There

Perhaps you have ideas about how to make your local waterways an asset to the community. How do you move toward your vision?

Plan

Plan for what you would like to achieve with project goals, objectives, timelines and funding options. Consider looking into the Alabama's 2026 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) that is being developed which will guide local, regional, statewide and federal agencies in providing for and managing public outdoor recreation within a state. Consider getting planning assistance from programs like the National Park Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program or discussing your ideas with the Alabama Association of Regional Councils (AARC).

Partner

Find local and regional partners who can help further your mission. Look into groups with similar goals like Rails to Trails Conservancy, Alabama Birding Trail, Main Street Alabama, The Nature Conservancy, Alabama Scenic Rivers Trail Outfitters or local universities that may have programs that align.

Provide

Search for funding. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) offers two potential sources of funding.

1. The Land and Water Conservation Fund provides outdoor recreational opportunities for the general public through land acquisition, development or a combination of acquisition and development.
2. The Recreational Trails Program provides grant assistance to state and federal agencies and local units of government for the acquisition and/or development or improvement of recreational trails and trail-related resources. For smaller projects, consider looking into Alabama Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils grants, watershed improvement grants from the Alabama Scenic River Trail, community foundations or other fund-raising initiatives.



Protect and Preserve

As more and more communities rediscover the value of their local waterways, it is important to ask how we plan to protect and preserve the wildlife and ecosystems that make our streams uniquely biodiverse and appealing, especially as many of our cities continue to grow.

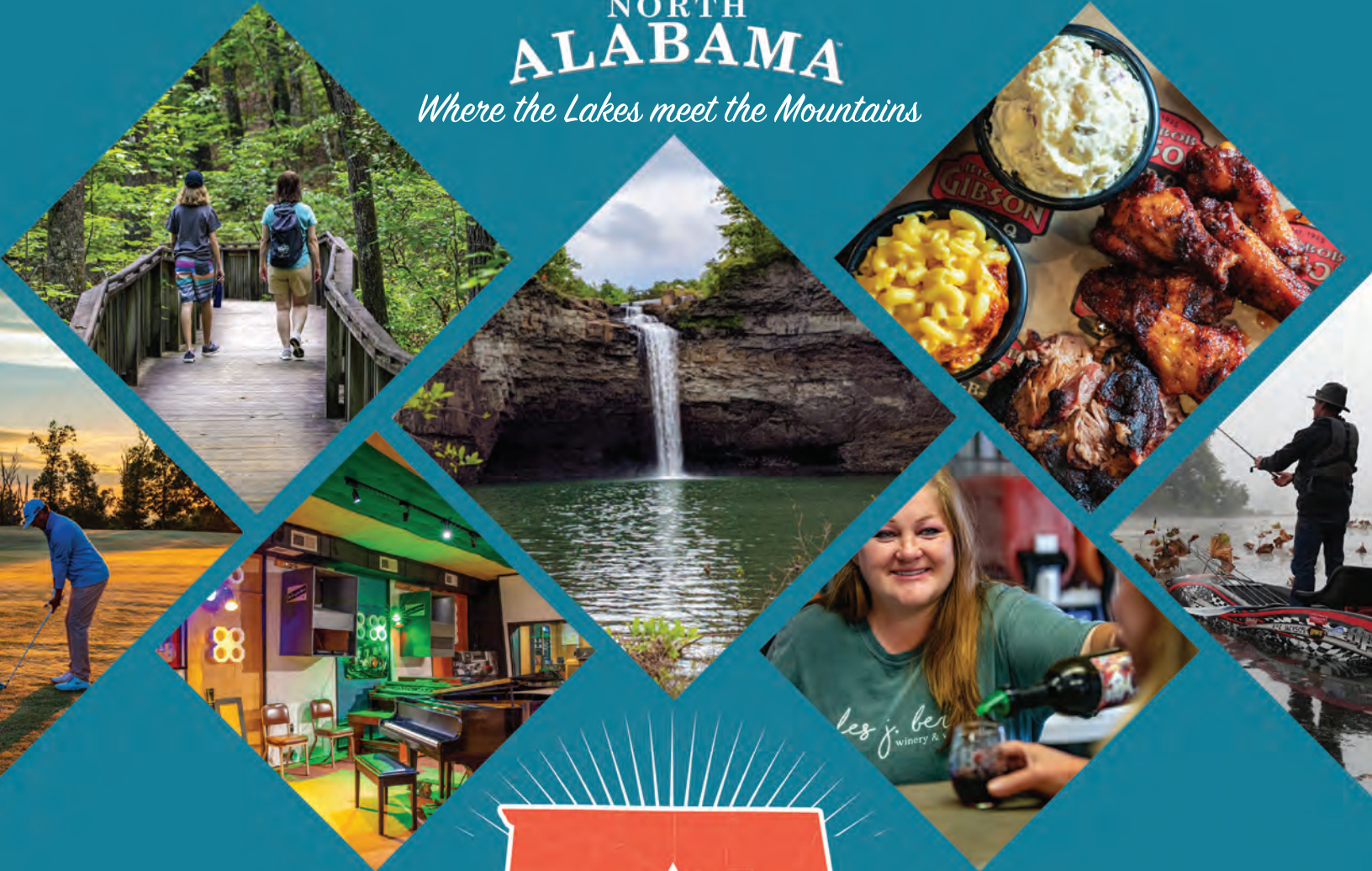
The gift of access to our waterways is also an invitation to care for them. "You can't love what you don't know," the saying goes. If you want people to love our waterways, we need to invite people to care for them and be mindful about how new development will impact local water resources in the long term. Consider getting local groups involved in Alabama Water Watch's citizen science water monitoring program to test local water quality or organize a group to do litter pickups in waterways. Get to know your local watershed groups or riverkeepers. Perhaps there are innovative opportunities that expand economic opportunities while also maintaining our beloved natural resources. ■



Laura Cooley is a project manager, planner, facilitator and community builder. She provides leadership to initiatives that involve multiple agencies in environmental planning, decision-making and restoration. She helps facilitate educational training opportunities, often for sectors working in green stormwater infrastructure and watershed planning. Cooley also develops communication strategies to engage the diverse audience that works with the Auburn University Water Resources Center.

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Alabama's Wellness Revolution:

How Cities Are Transforming Public Spaces with Fitness Courts®

Sarah Morgan | Communications and Marketing Coordinator | National Fitness Campaign

Across Alabama, a growing network of free, outdoor Fitness Courts is transforming the way residents access exercise. Thanks to an innovative public-private partnership between the National Fitness Campaign (NFC), Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama (BCBSAL) and its philanthropic arm, the Caring Foundation, more than 20 communities have embraced the campaign's mission: to build a healthier Alabama by expanding equitable access to wellness infrastructure. From Saraland to Huntsville, civic leaders are rallying around this initiative, citing improvements in quality of life, community engagement and long-term public health.

The Fitness Court is a world-class, outdoor wellness platform designed to deliver a full-body workout in just seven minutes. Built in parks, trails and downtown areas, each Fitness Court is free to the public and optimized for adults of all fitness levels. Through the Alabama Campaign, BCBSAL and NFC are empowering municipalities with grant funding, planning resources and design support to bring these installations to life.

"The Fitness Court definitely adds to the opportunities for better health and fitness for all the citizens of Hartselle," said Mayor Randy Garrison, who helped launch one of the first Fitness Courts in 2022 at Sparkman Park. "We want to make Hartselle bigger, better and healthier."

From Momentum to Movement

Since the first installation in Prattville, the Alabama Campaign has grown rapidly. New Fitness Courts have opened in Homewood, Northport, Fairhope and Kimberly, with more planned throughout 2025. At each launch event, city leaders,



Legacy Park in Huntsville features a vibrant Fitness Court.



An instructor leads a workout at the Saraland Fitness Court.



Saraland Mayor Howard Rubenstein and residents cut the ribbon on their new Fitness Court.



A participant at Saraland's Fitness Court enjoys a workout.

wellness ambassadors and community members come together to celebrate the shared commitment to active lifestyles.

Mayor Bill Gillespie of Prattville called the initiative a spark for community building. He said, “Upgraded and new quality-of-life opportunities are what bring communities together, start traditions and create lifelong memories.”

The city’s Fitness Court, located in the newly renovated Pratt Park, sits along a scenic creekside trail and is quickly becoming a hub for local fitness, with wellness businesses and military-themed workout events bringing in more than 100 participants on launch day alone.

In Northport, hundreds gathered in May 2024 to celebrate the opening of their Fitness Court. The ribbon-cutting ceremony showcased just how powerful community wellness can be when driven by local leadership and supported by state-level partnerships. As reported in *Tuscaloosa Thread*, the Fitness Court has quickly become a point of pride for the city, featuring vibrant public art and a design that seamlessly integrates into the park’s surroundings.

Local Leaders Champion Community Wellness

Across the state, city leaders are stepping up as champions for health, equity and access. In Saraland, Parks and Recreation Director Ashley-Nicole Flowers sees the Fitness Court as a cornerstone of their expansion at Town Center Park. She said, “Town Center Park will have something to engage the whole community in outdoor activities and the new Fitness Court will just enhance all the features of the park including public wellness. This campaign through our partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is giving us the cutting edge on community wellness.”

After their launch, the Saraland installation was activated by local ambassadors, including Kristin Nava and Crystal LeBlanc, who hosted free weekly classes designed to engage adults of all abilities and fitness levels.

In Huntsville, the city’s second Fitness Court opened at Legacy Park, a newly developed \$4.6 million recreation area. The Fitness Court features a mural by local artist Jamal “FRESKO” Turner and connects directly to walking trails frequented by neighborhood residents. Positioned near a private fitness center, the Fitness Court provides a free and accessible alternative for the community, reinforcing the city’s commitment to health equity and inclusion.

Tim King, community relations manager in Prattville, summed up the impact and shared, “We are consistently looking for opportunities to give back to the communities we serve so we can have a healthier Alabama. Bringing outdoor Fitness Courts to our state will give Alabamians access to an innovative platform that will help them lead an active and healthy life.”

A Statewide Partnership with Lasting Impact

The Alabama Campaign is unique because of its statewide vision. With support from BCBSAL and the Caring Foundation, the initiative is empowering cities both large and small to reimagine how public space can support public health. As highlighted in *Bham Now* and *Alabama News Center*, the momentum is not slowing down.

The city of Kimberly, for example, recently celebrated its Fitness Court’s opening in February 2025 with overwhelming community support. Mayor Robert Ellerbrock of Kimberly shared his excitement for the project, “We are so thrilled to have this new state-of-the-art, outdoor Fitness Court designed to inspire healthy living and provide a space where everyone in our community— young and old—can enjoy fitness in a fun, accessible way. The Fitness Court will feature equipment and activities for all fitness levels, offering a free, open-air space to exercise, connect with neighbors and prioritize your health. Whether you’re looking to kickstart a new fitness routine, challenge yourself with high-intensity workouts or simply enjoy some outdoor activity, this space is for you. We’re proud to invest in amenities



that enhance the well-being of our residents and build a stronger, healthier community.”

Public art is another hallmark of the campaign. In Hoover, local artists have added color and vibrancy to the Fitness Court’s back wall, reinforcing a sense of connection and civic pride.

Mayor Tommy Battle of Huntsville also praised the initiative, noting its ability to bring together wellness, accessibility and community design.

The Caring Foundation, which has a 30-year history of giving back across Alabama, plays a critical role in the campaign’s reach and long-term success. Their investment has helped expand the campaign’s footprint beyond major metros and into smaller, rural communities, ensuring that wellness resources reach all corners of the state.

Get Involved: 2025 Grant Funding Now Available

The Alabama Campaign is just getting started. Dozens of additional cities are in the early planning stages, and 2025 funding is now available on a rolling basis. Municipalities interested in applying for grant support can contact NFC directly to learn about eligibility and partnership.

For more information on the Alabama Campaign or to explore how your community can join the movement, please scan the QR code. ■





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The Alabama Municipal Insurance Corporation and the Municipal Workers Compensation Fund's Loss Control Division offers SKIDCAR proactive driver training. Municipal employees may encounter adverse driving situations on a day-to-day basis. Through an advanced, computer-controlled driver training vehicle known as the SKIDCAR System, students are taught a program based on driver discipline while experiencing a range of hazardous driving conditions at much lower and safer speeds. Although originally designed for law enforcement, **ALL** municipal employees are encouraged to complete the program for their own driving safety.

To schedule a training, contact the Loss Control Division at 334-262-2566 or email Donna Wagner at dwagner@almonline.org.

Remaining SKIDCAR Sessions in 2025:

Decatur August 12 – 22

Gadsden September 9 - 19

Vestavia Hills October 7 – 17

Oneonta November 12 - 21



Watch a video about SKIDCAR training by scanning the QR code!



Pricing for SKIDCAR training:

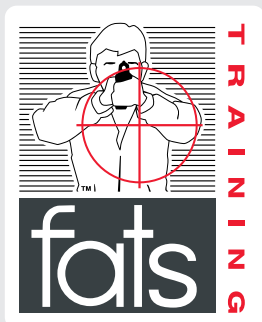
AMIC or MWCF Member	\$40.00 per person
ACCA Member (Sheriff's Department)	\$120.00 per person
Nonmember Rate	\$160.00 per person

Request the Firearms Training System Today

The Firearms Training System (FATS) is an excellent training tool designed to develop and sharpen a police officer's discretionary skills as well as reinforce their conflict resolution abilities.

As our society has become more violent - and the scrutiny on police officers more pervasive - the need for judgmental firearms training has become more crucial. FATS utilizes digital interactive training technology, allowing officers to develop decision-making skills by responding to real-life scenarios where force may be necessary.

Contact the Loss Control Division at (334) 262-2566 or email Deena Pregno at Dpregno@almonline.org to find out when FATS will be in your area. You can also request the FATS system by completing the online form at losscontrol.org.



Pricing for FATS training:

AMIC Member	\$25.00 per person
MWCF Member	\$25.00 per person
ALM Only Member	\$50.00 per person
Nonmember Rate	\$100.00 per person

View the FATS in action by scanning this QR code!



Scan this QR code to access the FATS system request form.



Learn Locally: *Kayley Peebles*

LURLEEN B. WALLACE
COMMUNITY COLLEGE



After graduating high school as valedictorian in 2023, I was not sure what my next steps would be. Like several of my classmates, I thought about attending a large university, but the idea of doing so right after high school seemed overwhelming. Having graduated from a class of only thirty-two students, the thought of transitioning to a massive campus did not feel like the right fit for me then. Fortunately, Lurleen B. Wallace Community College (LBW) provided me with an incredible opportunity to stay close to home, explore my options, and grow both academically and personally.

Thanks to the valedictorian scholarship paying for my first year's tuition and the ambassador program scholarship covering my second year, I could attend LBW without any tuition costs. This enabled me to concentrate on my academics and personal growth with zero financial stress. While at LBW, I also worked part-time in my community, allowing me to see familiar faces and keep a connection with those I was close with from home. Staying at home while studying at LBW proved to be the perfect decision, providing me with the time and support I needed to think about my future.

I began working toward my Associate of Science degree immediately, but my

path continued beyond that. Due to the dual enrollment courses I completed at LBW in high school, I was a semester ahead, allowing me to pursue other opportunities. With the advice of a fellow LBW ambassador, I found out about the college's esthetics program, an area that interested me greatly due to my own experiences. Having battled acne constantly during my high school years, I was frustrated with my skin and sought to learn the basics of skincare. This frustration eventually turned into a passion: to become a dermatologist.

Starting the esthetics program while pursuing my A.S. degree was one of the best decisions I have ever made. The program has deepened my skincare knowledge and offered me 225 internship hours—experience that will be essential for my future resumes and medical school applications. In addition, the guidance I have received from my instructors during my time at LBW has been life changing. Their enthusiasm and encouragement have enabled me to grow in a challenging academic setting while still feeling supported throughout my journey.

LBW provided me with chances beyond the classroom to develop my leadership skills. As an ambassador, I have represented the college at various events, connected with incoming students, and taken part in activities such as the Miss LBW pageant. Furthermore, being the president of the Covington County Compass Club

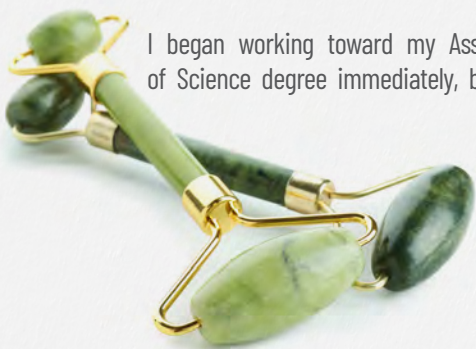
enabled me to participate more often in community events, coordinate fundraisers, and raise awareness about brain health. These experiences have instilled in me essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and service, which I will take into my future profession.

Now that I've graduated with an Associate of Science degree and an esthetics certification, I feel both confident and excited about the upcoming chapter in my journey. I plan to move to a four-year university in the fall of 2025 to keep working toward my goal of becoming a dermatologist. Reflecting on the past, I cannot picture a more ideal location to have begun my higher education journey. The small class sizes, helpful instructors, and loving community at LBW created a significant impact.

LBW was never just a "last resort" for me—it was the opportunity I needed to grow, pursue my interests, and prepare for my future. For those uncertain about their next steps after high school, I can wholeheartedly say that LBW provides more than merely an education; it is a place where you can discover your true passion and build the foundation for a successful career.



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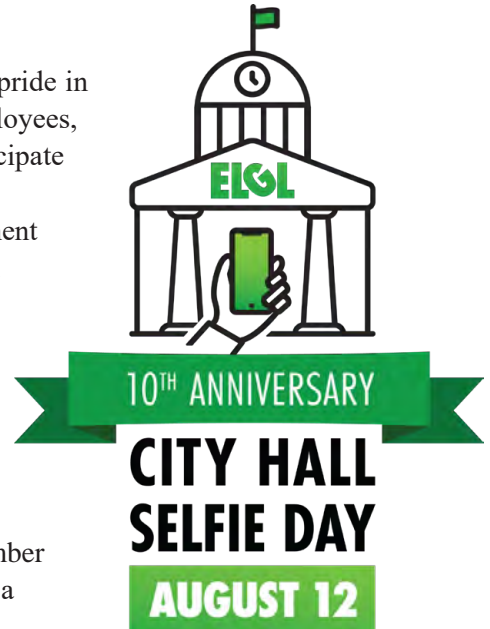
You're invited to participate in the 10th annual City Hall Selfie Day on August 12, 2025!

What is City Hall Selfie Day?

City Hall Selfie Day is a celebration of public service showcasing pride in local government institutions. Every year since 2016, government employees, elected officials, members of the media, and community members participate in the event.

City Hall Selfie Day is organized by ELGL, Engaging Local Government Leaders, a professional association for people who work in and with local government.

Visit cityhallselfie.com to learn more and see photos from past City Hall Selfie Day celebrations.



How can I participate?

Celebrating City Hall Selfie Day is easy:

- 1 Take a picture of yourself, with a group, or with a community member in front of your local government building. (It doesn't matter if it's a town, city, county, library, or special district building.)
- 2 Use the hashtags #CityHallSelfie and #LiveLocallyAlabama when posting the photo to social media.
- 3 Tag ALM and ELGL in your social media posts: @ALALM and @ELGLNetwork on Facebook, @alabamacitiesandtowns and @ELGL50 on Instagram, @alabama-league-of-municipalities and @ELGL on LinkedIn, @AL_League and @ELGL50 on X, @ELGL50 on Threads, or @localgov on TikTok.

How can I get the word out?

Share information about the celebration with your friends, colleagues, and community members! ELGL recognizes the people and organizations showing the most pride and creativity on the big day.

How Can I Use This Event to Promote the Importance of Municipal Government?

The Alabama League of Municipalities recently launched Live Locally Alabama on behalf of Alabama's municipal leaders to encourage civic engagement, instill community pride and highlight the crucial role municipal government plays in the daily lives of Alabama's citizens. Utilize events like City Hall Selfie Day to promote this quality-of-life initiative and remind citizens that the community they have chosen is a great place to live, work and play. Visit the Live Locally Alabama webpage for more information and resources: almonline.org/LiveLocallyAlabama.





ALM Honors Sam Gaston with 2025 Hometown Hero Award

Congratulations to Sam Gaston on being selected for the 2025 Hometown Hero Award!

Sam has served as city manager of Mountain Brook for 32 years, the longest tenure of any city manager in the city's history. He has also held the role of city manager in Powder Springs, Georgia and worked in municipal positions in Anniston, Gulf Shores and Decatur.

As city manager, Sam acts as the chief administrative officer, overseeing the city's operations and governmental functions. His responsibilities include preparing the annual budget and enforcing city laws, ordinances and policies. He is a vital part of Mountain Brook and is widely recognized as a valuable resource in the community.

During his decades of service to Mountain Brook, Sam has overseen transformative projects that have shaped the city into the thriving community it is today. Among his proudest accomplishments are the Cahaba Village and Lane Parke commercial developments, the construction of 48 miles of sidewalks and his role as an early proponent of establishing the Mountain Brook Chamber of Commerce. He also takes great pride in building a high-performing and dedicated city staff.

As he prepares to retire in November, Sam remains focused on completing several key initiatives. These include redevelopment plans for Alabama Veterans Memorial Park and Overton Park, the installation of new roundabouts near the Birmingham Zoo, additional sidewalk expansions, the completion of two bridge projects and the placement of a historical marker honoring Charles Zukowski, Mountain Brook's first mayor. Even in his final months as city manager, Sam continues to serve with the same commitment and vision that have defined his career.

In addition to his work as city manager, Sam has served as president of the Alabama City/County Management Association, the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association, the Anniston Sunrisers Kiwanis Club and the Homewood/Mountain Brook Kiwanis. He was also on the executive board of the International City-County Management Association (ICMA) from 2005 to 2008 and served as ICMA president from 2011 to 2012.

With decades of unwavering dedication and leadership, Sam Gaston's impact on Mountain Brook and beyond will be felt for generations to come - truly making him a hometown hero in every sense of the word. ■



Alabama's only state tax refund municipal debt recovery program

(FREE to eligible participating members!)

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.

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BODY: Pumper

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PUMP: Hale QMax

GPM: 1500 gpm

TANK: 2000 gallons

Crossroads Fire Department

CHASSIS: Rosenbauer Commander 6000

BODY: Pumper

ENGINE: Cummins L9

HORSEPOWER: 450 hp

PUMP: Hale

GPM: 1500 gpm

TANK: 1250 gallons



Catoma Fire Department

CHASSIS: Ford F550 Crew Cab

BODY: Mini-Rescue

ENGINE: 6.7L V8 Diesel

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ALM Expands Positions and Welcomes New Team Members

Lillian Pitman, Legislative Policy Analyst



Lillian Pitman, a native of the greater Birmingham area, joined the Alabama League of Municipalities as a legislative policy analyst in June 2025. Prior to joining as an analyst, she held an advocacy internship with the League for nine months.

Before relocating to Montgomery, Lillian traveled west to pursue her undergraduate degree at the University of Colorado Boulder. Throughout her college career, Lillian served the Boulder community as a student ambassador, connecting prospective students and alumni to the campus and through her volunteer service with CU's food pantry programs. She excelled academically through her involvement with the Conference on World Affairs, crafting expert panels in the fields of international affairs, politics and media. Lillian's academic pursuits led her to join the CU in D.C. internship program through the Washington Center in summer 2023.

A Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society member, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

In her free time Lillian enjoys reading, yoga, studying history and playing with her two dogs (Ryder and Brit). An avid skier, Lillian frequents the slopes surrounding her alma mater in Colorado as often as possible. During the summer, she finds joy volunteering as a camp counselor for critically ill children at Children's Harbor on Lake Martin.



Kerri Butler, Member Services Associate

Kerri Butler joined the Alabama League of Municipalities team in June 2025 as a member services associate. A proud Montgomery native, she earned her Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in sociology from Auburn University at Montgomery in 2001.

With over 22 years of experience in various roles within state government, Kerri brings a wealth of knowledge and dedication to public service. Most recently, she served as a member services specialist with the Alabama Supercomputer Authority. Now, she's excited to bring her extensive customer service background to the League, where she looks forward to supporting members with the same commitment and care.

Outside of work, Kerri stays busy with her two children, Breah and Kingston; her boyfriend, Eric; his son, Alex; and their lively household of three dogs and two cats.

Together, they enjoy a full schedule of baseball, football and basketball games, along with visits to family and all kinds of fun adventures.

Ty Rayford, Digital Media Specialist

Ty Rayford joined the League staff in July 2025 as the digital media specialist.

She is a graduate of Auburn University, where she earned her bachelor's degree in journalism, specializing in photojournalism. She was also a member of the band where she played the piccolo and oboe.

Ty's professional background includes working for the Alabama Community College System, Auburn University and Lifetouch. Ty's unique skillset in videography, graphic design and photography brings a wealth of knowledge and creativity to the communications team.

Ty is originally from Mobile, but currently lives in Montgomery with her wife, Morgan, and their two dogs: Junie B., an American Pitbull, and Reggie, a Boykin Spaniel/Pitbull mix.

In her spare time, Ty enjoys creative writing, playing Mario Kart, video chatting with her nephew and helping her niece navigate college.



2025

Fall Municipal Law Conference

September 25-27 • The Lodge at Gulf State Park • Gulf Shores



Join us for this three day event conference for Judges, Attorneys and Prosecutors that will provide in-depth discussions of timely municipal legal topics, addressed by experts who have experience with the subject. Members of AAMA and AMJA receive reduced rates. If you are unsure of your membership status, please contact us. For more information scan the QR code, or go to our training page, almonline.org/ConferencesAndTraining.



Continuing Education: This conference will be submitted for 12.0 hours of credit (including 1 hour of ethics) from the Alabama State Bar MCLE. Required 6 Judicial CLE will also be submitted to the Judicial College.

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almonline.org/CMOProgram

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